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THESIS

MORNING CALM, NUCLEAR SUNSET:
SOUTH KOREA'S ATOMIC OPTION

by

Alden D. Pierce

September 1998

Thesis Advisor: Peter R. Lavoy
Second Reader: James J. Wirtz

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U.S. national security strategy sets nuclear nonproliferation as a high priority. However, pursuing nonproliferation without regard for important traditional security relationships might yield undesired results. The Republic of Korea (ROK) requires a high degree of confidence in the U.S. security guarantee, one that includes an extended nuclear deterrent. The nuclear weapons program that South Korea began and abandoned in the 1970s was prompted by a decrease in confidence in U.S. security commitments. Conciliatory actions taken recently by the United States toward the Democratic Peoples' Republic of Korea (DPRK) to prevent a possible nuclear weapons program may undermine the U.S.-ROK security arrangement that has been in place for decades. This work examines perceived threats to South Korea and the U.S. security commitment to Korea since 1945 to reveal how U.S. nuclear nonproliferation policy affects Seoul's propensity to develop nuclear weapons. Recommendations are provided for policy makers regarding strengthening of ROK confidence in the U.S. commitment on the peninsula, with particular emphasis on preventing South Korea from pursuing a nuclear arsenal.

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MORNING CALM, NUCLEAR SUNSET: SOUTH KOREA'S ATOMIC OPTION

Alden D. Pierce
Lieutenant, United States Navy
B.A., University of California at Irvine, 1985

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ABSTRACT

U.S. national security strategy sets nuclear nonproliferation as a high priority. However, pursuing nonproliferation without regard for important traditional security relationships might yield undesired results. The Republic of Korea (ROK) requires a high degree of confidence in the U.S. security guarantee, one that includes an extended nuclear deterrent. The nuclear weapons program that South Korea began and abandoned in the 1970s was prompted by a decrease in confidence in U.S. security commitments. Conciliatory actions taken recently by the United States toward the Democratic Peoples' Republic of Korea (DPRK) to prevent a possible nuclear weapons program may undermine the U.S.-ROK security arrangement that has been in place for decades. This work examines perceived threats to South Korea and the U.S. security commitment to Korea since 1945 to reveal how U.S. nuclear nonproliferation policy affects Seoul's propensity to develop nuclear weapons. Recommendations are provided for policy makers regarding strengthening of ROK confidence in the U.S. security commitment on the peninsula, with particular emphasis on preventing South Korea from pursuing a nuclear arsenal.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Nuclear nonproliferation and a stable Korean peninsula are strategic imperatives for the United States. The U.S.-ROK security relationship dates back to the end of the Second World War. Seoul requires a high degree of confidence in this security relationship, one that includes an extended nuclear deterrent guarantee. ROK confidence in the U.S. security guarantee decreases the likelihood that Seoul will pursue a nuclear weapons program. A loss of this same confidence could result in South Korea developing a nuclear capability of its own to compensate for a perceived absence of U.S. support. Evidence indicates that the nuclear weapons program that ROK began in the 1970s was the result of a decrease in confidence in U.S. security commitments in Asia. Today, the way the United States deals with the North Korean nuclear crisis could threaten South Korean national security.

During the 1950s the Korean government saw the utility of nuclear weapons, both in the atomic diplomacy conducted by the United States during the Korean War and in the deployment of U.S. tactical nuclear weapons to the peninsula. The Korean War and the U.S.-ROK Mutual Defense Treaty established ROK reliance on the United States. The weak nature of the treaty, however, cast doubt on the U.S. commitment to ROK. The U.S. troop presence and deployment of nuclear weapons compensated for this weakness.

During the 1960s and 1970s, however, doubts regarding the U.S. commitment in Asia resurfaced. America's performance in Vietnam, the new Nixon Doctrine, and U.S. troop withdrawals from ROK spurred Seoul to pursue a more self-reliant military policy.

Although the Nixon Doctrine preserved U.S. extended nuclear deterrence for ROK, this commitment was ultimately based on the Mutual Defense Treaty; a weak foundation for confidence in strategic defense. Seoul's attempt to build nuclear weapons was the result of this perception.

The possibility of a North Korean nuclear weapon has overshadowed its conventional threat during the 1990s. Exclusive negotiations between the United States and North Korea are viewed by South Korea as endangering the U.S. commitment to the defense of South Korea, particularly concessions such as the cancellation of military exercises and a negative security guarantee. In addition, the Mutual Defense Treaty is not an agreement that U.S. troop presence strengthens, it is a weak link that these same forces attempt to overcome. These factors make a stronger treaty with the ROK government an important step in preventing Seoul from considering a nuclear option. For very little effort diplomatically, the United States can create a highly stable security environment in South Korea. A treaty more in line with a NATO commitment would give ROK the independence it seeks as a developing state and the ironclad commitment it desires for national security contingencies.

While the U.S. strategic nuclear commitment has existed since the Korean War, ROK confidence in extended deterrence is measured by the U.S. conventional presence. While the Nixon Doctrine still guaranteed U.S. strategic commitment to ROK, that same nuclear commitment lost credibility due to the decrease in conventional commitment that was outlined by the same policy. ROK leaders believed that if they were to fend for themselves in terms of defense, this would include nuclear weapons. Lack of

conventional commitment called into question the nuclear guarantee. The deployment of American tactical nuclear weapons to the peninsula inspired a special kind of confidence in the United States. Without tactical nuclear weapons, the continuation of troop presence will be vital to maintaining the high level of confidence that is required to prevent nuclear steps from being taken by Seoul.

The United States should avoid becoming the spokesman for the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and the United Nations (UN) in issues of nonproliferation. In Korea, it opened the playing field to a very creative DPRK to bring up virtually any unrelated issue it wished. An international lead taken by the United Nations and the IAEA would decrease the likelihood that North Korea could use unrelated issues to avoid or delay compliance with the Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT). The focus should be on NPT obligations and the required IAEA inspections.

The data in this work reveal a ROK civilian nuclear power program capable of supporting the development of a virtual nuclear capability. Seoul could pursue this option in a semi-covert manner, so as not to upset the United States with a withdrawal from the NPT. Nuclear weapons provide strong deterrence and the opportunity for internal balancing. U.S. policy should ensure that nonproliferation negotiations with the DPRK are not threatening to Seoul's national security. From the ROK perspective, nuclear weapons may be a possible answer to an ambiguous U.S. security commitment.

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I. NONPROLIFERATION IN NORTHEAST ASIA

A. SOUTH KOREAN NUCLEAR WEAPONS?

This thesis examines the conditions under which South Korea would develop nuclear weapons. U.S. national security strategy sets nuclear nonproliferation as a priority. In a March 1995 address, President Clinton declared that, "nothing is more important in this critical year of decision for arms control and nonproliferation than to achieve the indefinite extension of the NPT without conditions."[1] Pursuing nonproliferation without regard for important traditional security relationships may yield undesired results. Richard K. Betts makes this point in even blunter terms: "the reason that nuclear spread is undesirable is that it threatens our security; nonproliferation policy, therefore, has to be a subordinate component of national security policy."[2] Yet, recent policies might put nonproliferation ahead of U.S. regional security agreements.

B. COMPETING THEORIES AND LIMITATIONS

Although this work focuses on the security of a state as the motivator for development of a nuclear weapons program, there are well-respected alternate views

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[1] Factsheet, "A declaration by the President on Security Assurances for Non-nuclear Weapon States Parties to the Treaty on the Nonproliferation of Nuclear Weapons," (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, 1996) Available online at [http://www.acda.gov].

[2] Richard K. Betts, "Paranoids, Pygmies, Pariahs and Nonproliferation," *Foreign Policy* 26 (Spring 1977): 162.

about why states attempt to acquire nuclear weapons. Some of these include technological determinism, national prestige, and the mythmaker model.[3]

Technological determinism suggests that technological progress creates a certain momentum of its own. Nuclear weapons development occurs in a state simply because it is possible. The Republic of Korea (ROK) has made huge strides in technology, including civilian nuclear power and weapons technology that includes delivery vehicles. However, the United States did persuade ROK to abandon its program during the 1970s.

National prestige arguments assume that states acquire nuclear weapons to gain status in the international community. They are symbols of arrival into the club of heavy hitters. Examples of ROK seeking prestige include the 1988 Olympic Games and gaining membership in the United Nations. But acquiring nuclear weapons can lead to a state achieving pariah status, rather than serving as a sign that a country is on the fast track to modernization. The U.S. reaction to the development of nuclear weapons in ROK would also be negative.

Peter Lavoy's mythmaker model asserts that a state will go nuclear when "proficient and well-positioned individuals who want their county to build nuclear bombs, exaggerate security threats to make a 'myth of nuclear security' more compelling."[4] There is little doubt that South Korean President Pak Chung-Hee was a

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[3] Peter R. Lavoy, "Nuclear Myths and the Causes of Nuclear Proliferation," *Security Studies* 2, no. 3/4 (Spring/Summer 1993): 192-212; and Scott D. Sagan, "Why Do States Build Nuclear Weapons?: Three Models in Search of a Bomb," Security Studies 21, no. 3 (Winter 1993): 58.

[4] Lavoy, "Nuclear Myths and the Causes of Nuclear Proliferation," 192.

major force behind the nuclear program in the 1970s. In this case, however, ROK was a nation used to having nuclear weapons guarantee their security. The credibility of the provider of this security, the United States, was in doubt. External threats, specifically that of the Democratic Peoples' Republic of Korea (DPRK), were probably greatly exaggerated for this express purpose. Exaggeration of the threat for political purposes is not unknown in ROK.

Aspects of each of these theories might be valid in the ROK case, but realism is the most applicable theory in explaining South Korean behavior. According to Joseph A. Yager, "In some counties, the acquisition of nuclear weapons may be thought to enhance national prestige or increase the influence of the technological or military elite. There is no evidence that these considerations play any significant role in South Korean thinking. The case for ROK acquiring nuclear weapons rests entirely on national security."[5] Since 1948, South Korea has faced a constant and significant threat from the DPRK. The overwhelming reasons for the development of a nuclear arsenal would focus on this threat, and on a decrease in the credibility of the U.S. security guarantee. Since the late 1950s, the United States has provided a nuclear guarantee for ROK, a vital tile of deterrence in the mosaic of ROK national security.

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[5] Joseph A. Yager, "Northeast Asia", in *Nonproliferation and U.S. Foreign Policy,* eds. Richard Betts, William H. Courtney, Henry S. Rowen, Richard Brody and Joseph Yager. (Washington D. C.: The Brookings Institution, 1980), 50-1.

C. USING A REALIST LENS ON THE PENINSULA

The dual nature of U.S.–ROK security relations has created an environment ripe for the development of nuclear weapons. Since the end of the Second World War, Seoul has depended on U.S. military support and security guarantees. Although ROK has sometimes questioned this guarantee, the security relationship with the United States continues. A loss in confidence, according to realist theory, would cause Seoul to pursue a more reliable internal balance rather than continue to trust the external balance influenced by changing U.S. policy.[6] This internal balance consists of a self-sufficient military capability controlled domestically with a higher degree of confidence than an external balance based on potentially unreliable alliances. U.S. troop presence and nuclear guarantees have usually overcome ROK doubts regarding the Mutual Security Treaty. A ROK attempt at self-sufficiency would include a nuclear force since South Korea has relied on U.S. atomic weapons since the Korean War.

Realism predicts that the acquisition of nuclear weapons by one state will lead another state in the region to respond in kind.[7] This prediction would seem to hold when the two countries are hostile, as is the case with the two Koreas. Seo-Hang Lee points to the possible negative results of North Korea acquiring a nuclear weapon:

> In May 1994, National Unification Minister and Deputy Prime Minister, Lee Hong-Koo, stated that if North Korea developed "even half of a nuclear weapon," the 1991 Joint Declaration of the Denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula would be nullified. There is also growing sentiment

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[6] Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (New York: Random House, 1979), 168.

[7] Sagan, "Why Do States Build Nuclear Weapons?: Three Models in Search of a Bomb," 57-8.

> among some scientists and politicians for South Korea to cease abiding by the Joint Declaration that prohibited nuclear reprocessing. Reprocessing is not, of course, banned by the NPT.[8]

Ambiguity still exists concerning the existence of a bomb in the North Korea. This makes analysis of Seoul's perspective on U.S. actions and policies all the more important.

D. METHODOLOGY

This work examines milestone events since 1945 described by the following two variables: (1) perceived threats to South Korea; (2) the U.S. security commitment to Korea. I break this period into three phases. The first is 1945 to 1965. Here I explore the U.S. role in the liberation of Korea and the subsequent split of the peninsula, the Korean War and the diplomatic use and deployment of nuclear weapons in the 1950s. The second is 1965 to 1985. Here I focus on the Vietnam War, the Nixon Doctrine, U.S. troop withdrawals and the squelched ROK nuclear weapons program. The third is 1985 to the present. In this section, I analyze the post-Cold War security environment and the nuclear crisis in the DPRK. A study of these events will reveal the U.S. role in ROK national security, ROK confidence in that role, and how U.S. nuclear nonproliferation policy affects the ROK propensity to develop nuclear weapons. An examination of the essential events that affected the South Korean leadership's perception of external threats and U.S. security commitment to South Korea allows for analysis of Seoul's current and future perspective on required national defense capabilities. This thesis assesses the

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[8] Seo-Hang Lee, "Nuclear Proliferation in Northeast Asia: South Korean Perspective," in *Nuclear Policies in Northeast Asia*, ed. Andrew Mack (New York: United Nations, 1995), 193.

sources and catalysts of South Korea's nuclear ambitions today as they are influenced by U.S. commitments to both nuclear nonproliferation toward North Korea and regional security in Northeast Asia.

E. THE ROK PROGRAM AND THE NORTH KOREAN CRISIS

Andrew Mack emphasizes the fine line between ensuring that North Korea does not develop the bomb and keeping ROK confidence in the U.S. security guarantee high: "South Korea, which is rapidly overhauling the North militarily and economically, and which is also 'protected' by the US 'nuclear umbrella', has a clear interest in a denuclearised Korean peninsula, providing the North does not go nuclear and providing Seoul retains confidence in its alliance relationship with the US."[9] The nuclear weapons program that ROK began in the 1970s was the result of a decrease in confidence in U.S. security commitments. Actions taken by the United States prevented ROK from continuing the development of nuclear weapons. Crucial among these actions were the cancellation of the planned troop withdrawal from Korea by the Carter administration in the late 1970s and the promise of continued support for the ROK civilian nuclear power program. Today, South Korea has a robust nuclear power program and the U.S. troop presence continues.

The manner in which the United States dealt with the recent North Korean nuclear crisis could again call into question U.S. credibility. Today, however, the possible

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[9] Andrew Mack, "A Northeast Asia Nuclear-Free Zone: Problems and Prospects," in *Nuclear Policies in Northeast Asia*, ed. Andrew Mack (New York: United Nations, 1995), 106.

presence of a North Korean nuclear arsenal and a waning U.S. influence in Korea change the dynamics of the situation. The United States does not possess the same authority over Seoul that it did in the 1970s.

F. RELEVANCE TO U.S. NATIONAL SECURITY

Nuclear weapons nonproliferation and a stable, nuclear-free Korean peninsula are high priorities in the United States National Security Strategy. In outlining the top priorities for U. S. national security, National Security Strategy states that, "we must continue to move strongly to counter growing dangers to our security: weapons of mass destruction, terrorism, international crime...acting to prevent nuclear materials from falling into the wrong hands...".[10] A State Department paper on nuclear nonproliferation states, "the United States is strongly committed to the NPT, to efforts that further strengthen the Treaty, and to the broader international nonproliferation and arms control regime."[11] In April 1996, President Clinton also reaffirmed Washington's commitment to systematic and progressive efforts to reduce nuclear weapons globally, with the ultimate goal of eliminating nuclear weapons.[12]

Although the specter of a bipolar nuclear exchange between the United States and Russia is waning, the prospect of nuclear weapons proliferation in developing states is of

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[10] White House, "A National Security Strategy For A New Century," (Washington D.C.: National Security Council, 1997) Available online at [http://www.whitehouse.gov].

[11] State Department Fact Sheet, "U.S. Commitment to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons," (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, 1997).

[12] Fact Sheet, "U.S. Commitment to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons,"

great concern. Many of these states possess both civilian nuclear power programs and delivery vehicle technology. Adherence to elements of the nonproliferation regime is an important element in preventing advancing nations from using nuclear power technology to develop atomic weapons programs. Japan's latent nuclear capability and plutonium stockpile, North Korea's still ambiguous nuclear program and the acquisition of nuclear weapons by Israel, Pakistan and India (all non-signatories to the Nonproliferation Treaty) call into question the utility of the NPT.[13] The May 1998 underground Indian and Pakistani nuclear tests are further proof that countries consider nuclear weapons of great enough importance to national security to risk international economic sanctions. Exploring the motivations to acquire nuclear capabilities while forging new nonproliferation strategies is a complex, yet important step in countering these dangers. U.S. nonproliferation policy must enhance, not contradict, U.S. regional security guarantees.

G. ROADMAP

Chapter II covers events from the Second World War to the mid 1960s. Chapter III discusses the rise and fall of the South Korean nuclear weapons program in the 1970s, including the events that led South Korea to undertake the program and the actions that were taken by the United States to short circuit ROK acquisition of nuclear weapons.

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[13] For background on the nuclear ambitions of these states, see, Michael J. Mazarr, *North Korea and the Bomb: A Case Study in Nonproliferation* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995); Reiss, *Bridled Ambition: Why Countries Constrain their Nuclear Capabilities;* and Mitchell Reiss and Robert S. Litwak, eds., *Nuclear Proliferation after the Cold War* (Washington D.C.: The Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 1994).

Chapter IV analyzes events in the 1980s and the North Korean nuclear crisis of 1995, examining the gap between U.S. nonproliferation policy toward North Korea and the security guarantees still in place with regard to South Korea. Chapter V draws conclusions using the evidence described in the previous chapters to explain what factors influence ROK to consider a nuclear option and assesses Seoul's current nuclear technology. Finally, I will outline recommendations for policy makers regarding the dilemma between U.S. regional security policy and non-proliferation diplomacy, providing steps to strengthen both ROK confidence in U.S. security commitments on the peninsula while still achieving U.S. nonproliferation goals.

II. ORIGINS OF U.S.-ROK RELATIONS

A. INTRODUCTION

An assessment of the likelihood that ROK would pursue a nuclear weapons program requires an examination of the U.S.-ROK security relationship. This chapter identifies ROK security milestones from 1945 to 1965. It outlines the origins of the U.S.–ROK security relationship and subsequent events that affected U.S. commitment to the peninsula. During this period, the United States moved from a policy of minimum commitment in Korea, to regarding the Korean peninsula as a vital front in the U.S. struggle against the spread of communism. This was a battle of utmost importance in U.S. national security. Arthur Power Dudden writes of the Cold War significance of the Korean peninsula: "In part at least, owing to its unresolved outcome, the Korean War redefined international relations as a gigantic struggle ongoing between Communist societies and beleaguered defenders of the so-called free-world."[14] Key events in this period include the use of nuclear threats against the Peoples' Republic of China by the United States during the Korean War, the signing and implementation of the U.S.–ROK Mutual Defense Treaty of 1953, and the deployment of U.S. tactical nuclear weapons to the Korean peninsula beginning in the late 1950s.

While the United States viewed its policy toward Korea within a global, Cold War context, ROK officials regarded the U.S. security guarantee as a vital aegis against the

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[14] Arthur Power Dudden, *The American Pacific: From the Old China Trade to the Present* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 232.

threat in North Korea. This commitment included not only an American troop presence, but a nuclear deterrent as well, although the currents of the Cold War directed U.S. policy. From Seoul's perspective, the U.S. security commitment was vital to ROK national security, but was regarded with some skepticism. According to Ronald D. McLaurin, "For Korea, all other matters around the world must be interpreted in terms of their impact on the Korean Peninsula. The United States can accept a setback in Korea, however undesirable. This is an existential issue for Korea."[15] U.S. forces provided security against the threat to the north. The use of nuclear weapons to guarantee ROK national security began early in the atomic age. The result was that Korea relied almost completely on the United States for its national security requirements, while remaining skeptical of U.S. credibility. In the past, U.S. support waxed and waned. The U.S. withdrawal prior to the Korean War and the less than ironclad U.S.-ROK Mutual Defense Treaty weakened confidence in the United States. The Korean War and the deployment of U.S. tactical nuclear weapons were, in contrast, confidence builders. From Seoul's view, the future of the U.S. security commitment to the Korean peninsula was far from guaranteed. Later U.S. actions reinforced this perception.

B. U.S. POLICY OF MINIMUM COMMITMENT

The roots of the U.S.-ROK security relationship date back to the Soviet-American liberation of the Korean peninsula in 1945. Underlying Korean doubts regarding the U.S.

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15 Ronald D. McLaurin, "Security Relations: Burden –Sharing In A Changing Strategic Environment," in *Alliance Under Tension: The Evolution of South Korean-U.S. Relations*, eds. Ronald D. McLaurin, Manwoo Lee and Chung-in Moon (Boulder: Westview Press, 1988), 229.

commitment to Korea, however, actually originate with the U.S. recognition of Japan's annexation of Korea earlier in the century. The Taft-Katsura memorandum of 29 July 1905 and the subsequent recall of Edwin Morgan, the American minister to Korea, in November 1905, confirmed U.S. acquiescence to Japan's aggression toward Korea.[16] While the details of these policies are beyond the scope of this work, the results are not. U.S. policy after the Second World War lacked an appreciation for Korean national interest and history, and called into question U.S. credibility as a liberator and guarantor of security. Two U.S. Army Lieutenant Colonels, Dean Rusk and Charles Bonesteel, using a National Geographic map for reference, split the U.S. and Soviet zones at the 38th parallel. Had a Korea expert been present, they might have learned that this was the same line that Japan and Russia had contemplated after the Russo-Japanese War: the 38th parallel already smacked of major powers dividing Korea as the spoils of war.[17]

In 1945, the United States began administering its portion of the Korean peninsula. America's lack of expertise and the low priority of the Korean problem were again conspicuous. A U.S. military government, headed by General John R. Hodge, USA, was set up to administer Korea south of the 38th parallel. In the absence of guidance from Washington, General Hodge governed in an ad hoc fashion, leading to dire economic conditions in the south. The administration also continued to employ Japanese

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[16] Dae-Sook Suh, "The Centennial: A Brief History," in *Korea and the United States*, eds. Youngnok Koo and Dae-Sook Suh (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1984), 7.

[17] Don Oberdorfer, *The Two Koreas: A Contemporary History* (Reading, Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley, 1997), 6.

personnel from the defeated colonial government in managerial positions.[18] General Hodge was unaware of the Korean hatred of the Japanese following their despotic colonial rule of the peninsula.[19] Not only was Hodge not aware of the Korean bitterness toward their former colonial masters, but he was directed by Washington not to recognize any of the Korean political fronts that had formed during and after the war. This included the provisional government that had been in exile in China and that most Koreans respected.[20] Hodge's orders removed from the running the best organizations to form a new government in Korea. This stood in sharp contrast with the Soviet administered north, which rapidly established a centralized regime around former guerrilla fighter Kim Il-Sung and cleansed itself of any Japanese colonial remnants.[21]

A joint commission was set up between the Soviet forces in the north and the U.S. forces in the south. This arrangement was to be temporary: the original trusteeship was set for five years. Its mission was to ensure that a stable Korean government was established. The commission was a failure. Suspicions ran too high between the emerging superpowers to oversee elections and set up a new Korean government. By 1947, the U.S. War Department supported complete disengagement and troop withdrawal from Korea. The State Department, contemplating the impending Cold War with the

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[18] Joo-Hong Nam, *America's Commitment to South Korea: The First Decade of the Nixon Doctrine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 18.

[19] Suk-Bok Lee, *The Impact of U.S. Forces in Korea* (Washington D.C.: National Defense University Press, 1987), 10.

[20] Lee, *The Impact of U.S. Forces in Korea*, 10.

Soviet Union, realized that such action would turn the entire Korean peninsula over to a communist-backed regime. This disagreement ultimately led the United States to defer the problem of Korea to the newly formed United Nations, hoping that this would prevent Soviet occupation of the entire peninsula. This policy of minimum commitment was followed by a withdrawal of most of the U.S. military personnel from the area. In 1947, a UN commission was established and held elections, which the government in the north refused to recognize. Thus, the Republic of Korea was born on 15 August 1947. The Democratic Peoples' Republic of Korea came into existence in September of the same year.[22]

Even as the peninsula split, Washington was searching for a way to depart from the peninsula, while still ensuring that Korea gained its sovereignty according to the Yalta and Cairo agreements.[23] In September of 1947, American policy stated that, "every effort should be made to liquidate or reduce the U.S. commitment of men and money in Korea as soon as possible without abandoning Korea to Soviet domination."[24] One result of this contradictory policy was the inability to create a workable, united government in Korea. This hollow commitment on the part of the United States contributed to the north-south split and the Korean War. The unenlightened performance of the U.S. military

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[21] Nam, *America's Commitment to South Korea*, 18.

[22] Donald Stone Macdonald, *The Koreans: Contemporary Politics and Society* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1990), 46-7.

[23] Nam, *America's Commitment to South Korea*, 13.

[24] Lee, *The Impact of U.S. Forces in Korea*, 20.

government in Korea and the subsequent withdrawal of most U.S. troops despite a hostile government in Pyongyang are not likely to be forgotten by South Koreas, in spite of the later U.S. commitment during the Korean War.

C. NUCLEAR DIPLOMACY IN THE KOREAN WAR

The Korean War also saw the first use of nuclear diplomacy. During the Korean conflict, President Truman ordered nuclear configured bombers into the theater in 1950 and Secretary of State John Foster Dulles told India's Jawaharal Neru in 1953 that the United States would use "stronger rather than lesser" military force if the talks in Panmunjom ended.[25] Whether this atomic posturing actually brought about the cease-fire in Korea is still debated.[26] The perception at that time was that nuclear threats were the deciding factor. Nuclear weapons had changed the world of security and diplomacy. The leaders of both Koreas saw the utility and necessity of including a nuclear element at some level in their respective national security programs. Security guarantees from the United States and the Soviet Union, and their respective atomic arsenals provided this nuclear deterrent. External guarantees are less credible than possessing a defense capability within one's own state.[27] ROK was not capable of standing up its own defense

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[25] Mazarr, *North Korea and the Bomb*, 15-6.

[26] Roger Dingman, "Atomic Diplomacy During the Korean War," *International Security* 13, no. 3 (Winter 1988): 50-91.

[27] Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, 126.

force and relied on the capabilities of the United States for protection against the menace to the north. A part of those capabilities was a nuclear arsenal.

Recent literature raises questions regarding the significance given to these nuclear threats in ending the fighting.[28] The perception at the time and for years after, however, was that atomic arms played a major role in bringing the communists to the negotiating table. Even critics of nuclear diplomacy concede that the issue is not that nuclear weapons were not influential, but that they were less so than previously believed. Richard K. Betts, for example, points out some of the difficulties in evaluating use of nuclear diplomacy:

> ...the greatest barrier to judging the efficacy of threats is that there is not reliable evidence about what leaders in Moscow or Beijing were thinking during the crisis. Thus there is no way to be sure what their initial objectives were or how high they placed them, and therefore no way to be sure how much they really conceded in the outcomes of the confrontations.[29]

Nevertheless, it is the perception during the early 1950s that is important in this study. These events gave legitimacy to Eisenhower's New Look strategy, the concept of substituting nuclear weapons for conventional ones.[30] Nuclear weapons had been used to reach an armistice. Jerome H. Kahan notes that, "...to President Eisenhower and a number of his advisors, the lesson of Korea appeared to confirm at an early stage the

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[28] Rosemary J. Foot, "Nuclear Coercion and the Ending of the Korean Conflict," *International Security* 13, no. 3 (Winter 1988/9): 92.

[29] Richard K. Betts, *Nuclear Blackmail and Nuclear Balance* (Washington D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1987), 18.

validity of a defense policy that avoided the need to invest resources in preparing for conventional land wars by relying on nuclear power."[31] Seoul would come to rely on U.S. weapons guaranteeing the security of South Korea. The New Look strategy had come into being and the deployment of tactical nuclear weapons to ROK would tie Korean defense to nuclear arms for decades to come.

D. U.S.–ROK MUTUAL DEFENSE TREATY

The Mutual Defense Treaty, signed on 1 October 1953, a little over two months after the armistice, was designed to prevent renewed communist aggression on the Korean peninsula.[32] It also responded to President Singman Rhee's insistence on receiving American aid and a security commitment. According to Lee Suk Bok, "When President Rhee voiced strong objections to the armistice, the US government promised, in addition to the treaty, large-scale economic and military aid, and an increase of twenty Army divisions and naval air forces in compensation."[33] The treaty yielded two very different results. It inextricably tied the security of ROK to the Cold War. The weak language of the agreement also reinforced the ever-present doubts in Seoul about continued U.S. support. The Mutual Defense Treaty manifests the dichotomy of the U.S.-

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[30] Betts, *Nuclear Blackmail and Nuclear Balance*, 37.

[31] Jerome H. Kahan, *Security in the Nuclear Age: Developing U.S. Strategic Arms Policy* (Washington D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1975), 18.

[32] Claude A. Buss, *The United States and the Republic of Korea: Background for Policy* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1982), 67.

[33] Lee, *The Impact of U.S. Forces in Korea*, 57.

ROK security relationship that still exists today. It is this agreement that eventually led to the deployment of U.S. troops and tactical nuclear weapons onto the peninsula and the guarantee of a nuclear umbrella for ROK. The U.S. point of view, however, was that Korean security was important in the context of the Cold War, not because Korean interests coincided with those of the United States. As Joo-Hong Nam points out, "The essential American objective in Korea was nonetheless not the security of South Korea *per se* but overall regional stability that might be affected by developments in Korea. In other words, the U.S. was committed not so much to goals in Korea as to goals threatened by Korean instability."[34]

The wording of the treaty itself does not guarantee U.S. protection, even in the case of attack from North Korea. The essential portions of the treaty are articles two, three and four:

> Article II: The parties will consult together whenever, in the opinion of either of them, the political independence or security of either of the parties is threatened by external armed attack, separately and jointly, by self-help and mutual aid, the parties will maintain and develop appropriate means to deter armed attack and will take suitable measures in consultation and agreement to implement this treaty and to further its purposes.
>
> Article III: Each party recognizes that an armed attack in the Pacific area on either of the parties' territories now under their respective administrative control, or hereafter recognized by one of the parties as lawfully brought under the administrative control of the other, would be dangerous to its own peace and safety and declares that it would act to meet the common danger in accordance with its constitutional processes.

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[34] Nam, *America's Commitment to South Korea*, 45.

Article IV: The Republic of Korea grants, and the United States of America accepts, the right to dispose United States land, air, and sea forces in and about the territory of the Republic of Korea as determined by mutual agreement.[35]

Article two, with its references to self-help and the development of appropriate means to deter an armed attack, could be used to support the development of a strong, modern ROK defense force. These references to deterrence make it clear that the ability to win an armed conflict against the DPRK is not the goal of the ROK defense force and the Mutual Defense Treaty with the United States. The goal is to deter an attack. This is precisely the type of argument used when discussing the deployment of nuclear weapons to the Korean peninsula. The wording of article two, the core of the treaty, is ambiguous about the sort of U.S. commitment it guarantees. Is there a guarantee of automatic intervention, as with the NATO treaty? According to Nam, the Mutual Defense Treaty is, "essentially a unilateral guarantee. However, the language of the U.S. defense commitment to the Republic was written according to the traditional Monroe Doctrine formula. Under this the U.S. can, if it so chooses, avoid an automatic involvement in any local conflict in the name of mutually acknowledged constitutional restraints."[36] Many Koreans question when and if the United States would come to Seoul's aid. Lee Suk Bok points out that, "Koreans believe that the U.S. presence in Korea fulfills the terms of the treaty, but they question whether the United States has the will to come to Korea's

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[35] Senate Committee on Governmental Affairs, *Nuclear Proliferation Factbook*, prepared by the library of Congress Congressional Research Service, 103d Cong., 2d sess., 1995, Committee Print 103, 455.

[36] Nam, *America's Commitment to Korea*, 146.

defense."[37] This infers that the U.S. troop presence is more important than the treaty itself because it serves as a tripwire for other commitment, including nuclear assets.[38]

E. DEPLOYMENT OF U.S. NUCLEAR ARMS

The U.S. deployment of nuclear weapons to ROK was a natural extension of the Eisenhower New Look strategy and the U.S. defense commitment, however ambiguous, offered by the Mutual Defense Treaty. Article two of that document states as a goal the deterrence of armed attack. The New Look emphasized reliance upon U.S. superiority in nuclear weapons, not conventional forces.[39] Although applying this policy to regional commitments risked nuclear escalation, the Cold War ranked high enough in U.S. national interest to justify that risk on the Korean peninsula. There is also evidence that the deployment of these weapons was not considered extraordinary. Kahan points out that early in Eisenhower's second term he concluded that tactical nuclear weapons had become "an almost routine part of our equipment" and acknowledged that the United States would almost be required to use these systems in an Asian crisis "the way our

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[37] Lee, *The Impact of U.S. Forces in Korea*, 58.

[38] Doug Bandow, *Tripwire: Korea and U.S. Foreign Policy in a Changed World* (Washington, D.C.: Cato Institute, 1996).

[39] Young-Sun Ha, "American-Korean Military Relations: Continuity and Change," in *Korea and the United States* eds. Youngnok Koo and Dae-Sook Suh (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1984), 126.

forces are organized in that area."[40] Deployment of tactical nuclear weapons occurred in 1957-58 in the form of Honest John rockets and 280mm artillery rounds.[41]

It was not until almost 20 years later that the United States acknowledged the presence of U.S. tactical nuclear weapons on the peninsula. It was also at this time that the United States made public the strategy to use nuclear weapons against North Korea during a conflict. In fact, plans to use nuclear weapons in the defense of Korea had been in place since their deployment in 1957-8.[42]

F. CONCLUSION

The events chronicled in this chapter illustrate two important points. One, the varying nature of U.S. commitment to Korea did not begin with the Nixon Doctrine (discussed in Chapter III), but has been evident since early in this century. Although Seoul has depended almost completely on the United States for national security since the Korean War, that reliance is also a weakness. The Korean people doubt the U.S. commitment to their defense. U.S. support of Japan's annexation of Korea early in this century was a glimpse at what was to come. The lack of American commitment to the liberation and post-war administration of Korea played a significant part in bringing about the split of the north and south and the Korean War. The Mutual Defense Treaty is both

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[40] Kahan, *Security in the Nuclear Age*, 17.

[41] Nam, *America's Commitment to South Korea*, 87; also Oberdorfer, *The Two Koreas*, 257.

[42] Ralph N. Clough, *Deterrence and Defense in Korea: The Role of U.S. Forces, Studies in Defense Policy* (Washington D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1976), 5.

necessary for ROK security and at the same time is far from an ironclad commitment. Some events have called into question the U.S. commitment to Korean defense despite ROK reliance on the U.S. for much of its defense since the Second World War. The U.S. acquiescence to Japan's colonization of Korea and U.S. actions between the Second World War and the Korean War reinforced this doubt.

Almost since the creation of the Republic of Korea, nuclear weapons have been integral to ROK national security. Although ROK nuclear aspirations did not surface until much later, events during this period displayed to Seoul the power, diplomatic utility and necessity of nuclear weapons to the national security strategy of South Korea. The threatened use of nuclear weapons to end the Korean War and the subsequent deployment of tactical nuclear weapons to the peninsula tied these devices, from the beginning, to ROK security.

III. VIETNAM, NIXON, AND THE CARTER YEARS

A. IMPACT OF THE VIETNAM ERA

U.S. policies during the 1960s and 1970s decreased Seoul's confidence in the U.S. commitment to Korean defense to the point that ROK began a nuclear weapons program. An analysis of the U.S.-ROK relationship during the 1960s and 1970s is critical to this thesis because this situation could again arise and cause Seoul to consider a nuclear option for similar reasons. The war in Vietnam should have reinforced confidence in the American commitment in Asia. In reality it did just the opposite. The American record in Southeast Asia and the fall of Saigon resulted in faltering confidence in the U.S. security commitment throughout Asia. No longer could Seoul assume that the global struggle against communism would anchor Korea to the U.S. National Security Strategy. Walter F. Hahn states that the outcome of American involvement in Vietnam "represented the collapse of a U.S. commitment and endeavor that spanned the better part of two decades."[43] Events from 1965 to 1975 confirmed a waning U.S. resolve. This chapter identifies three results of the Vietnam War: a realization that a security relationship with the U.S. obligated Seoul to send troops overseas; a loss of confidence in U.S. guarantees in Asia; and the expectation of American troop withdrawals in Asia. The North Korean seizure of the U.S. intelligence ship, *USS Pueblo*, and the resulting incident

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[43] Walter F. Hahn, "American Introversion Post-Vietnam." *Strategic Review* 3, no. 4 (Fall 1975): 18-9.

is also discussed. This event decreased confidence in Washington's commitment to Asia and foreshadowed the coming *Nixon Doctrine*.

South Korea deployed troops to Vietnam in 1965. This occurred at the behest of the United States. To emphasize the global nature of the conflict in Vietnam against the expansion of communism, the United States formed a multinational force. It put the fight against communism in Southeast Asia in the same category as its commitment to South Korea. Although the European states balked at this plea, Asian allies, including the Philippines, Japan and South Korea, contributed to the effort. In an agreement for continued U.S. presence and military equipment, Seoul sent two ROK Army divisions into combat in Vietnam.[44] ROK reliance on the United States involved Seoul in an unwanted commitment in Vietnam. Ironically, since President Park wanted to decrease ROK dependence on the United States, the troops were sent with the agreement that the United States would help Seoul modernize the ROK military. Washington provided a significant package of economic and military payments listed in the Brown Memorandum of 1966.[45] The commitment of South Korean troops in Vietnam as a quid pro quo for high tech weapons was part of a larger plan for a South Korean military capable of fending for itself.[46] The Vietnam War was actually an economic boon to ROK. Procurement and construction contracts accounted for up to forty percent of South

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[44] Nam, *America's Commitment to South Korea*, 58.

[45] Carter J. Eckert et al, ed. *Korea, Old and New: A History* (Seoul: Ilchokak Publishers, 1990), 398.

[46] Eckert et al, *Korea, Old and New: A History*, 398.

Korea's foreign exchange earnings.[47] Nevertheless, the ROK government also realized that dependence on the United States obligated ROK to send troops to Vietnam that would otherwise have guarded the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ). This was a part of the security agreement that Seoul had not anticipated.

The sudden collapse of South Vietnam which had been supported by the United States for over twenty years, caused U.S. allies in Asia to have doubts about the reliability of the United States if they should face a military threat. The American withdrawal had a strong affect on South Korea's view of the U.S. commitment.[48] Although American policy makers called Vietnam a war of global consequences, and one that required support from other Asian nations, U.S. commitment flagged as the American public questioned involvement in Southeast Asia. When calling for support, Washington originally compared the situation in Southeast Asia with that of Korea.[49] Given the U.S. withdrawal from South Vietnam, the earlier comparison with its security agreement with South Korea did not inspire confidence in Seoul. The fall of Saigon did not result in U.S. allies questioning U.S. capability, but U.S. resolve in Asia. Hahn observes that, "perceptions abroad have seen the fall of Vietnam not so much as an American defeat as an American abandonment."[50] The belief that other nations should share in the burden of

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47 Oberdorfer, *The Two Koreas*, 33,64.

48 Clough, *Deterrence and Defense in Korea*, 1.

49 Nam, *America's Commitment to South Korea*, 58.

50 Hahn, "American Introversion Post-Vietnam," 23.

leadership and defense resulted not only in the withdrawal from Vietnam but in the Nixon Doctrine. These policies became the focus of a new approach toward defense and self-reliance for Seoul.

ROK confidence in U.S. support was waning after the fall of Saigon. Ambassador Richard Sneider recommended that the United States restructure its policies toward Korea and strengthen its commitment. Washington declined this suggestion in favor of recommending disengagement from Korea and Asia, particularly in light of the recent and still painful memory of the Vietnam experience.[51] Interestingly, Sneider, realizing the weakness of the Mutual Defense Treaty of 1953, recommended a plan he called "durable partnership," which outlined a strong security agreement similar to those of NATO and Japan.[52] From Washington's point of view, however, security commitments were changing and the United States soon began to discuss withdrawing forces from the Korean peninsula. Washington's new policy on overseas security commitments helped Seoul justify its new program of self-reliance in the 1970s.

The capture of the crew of the U.S. intelligence ship *USS Pueblo,* in January 1968, represented the culmination of the many problems with U.S. credibility during this era. As the DPRK captured, tortured and held hostage American sailors, ROK and the world waited for the United States to respond to this crisis. Kissinger stated that in demanding nothing, the United States had lost the opportunity to either accept

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[51] Oberdorfer, *The Two Koreas*, 65-6.

[52] Oberdorfer, *The Two Koreas*, 65-6.

compensation or justify retaliation, depending upon Pyongyang's response.[53] The perception was that the United States had taken an unorganized, ad hoc approach, fearing reactions from the unpredictable DPRK, which eventually returned the captured men.[54] Nam asserts that this translated into reduced U.S. credibility from the ROK point of view.[55] This event also called into question the effectiveness of U.S. forces in Northeast Asia, which did not prevent the incident.

The *Pueblo* incident severely damaged the credibility of the deterrent effect of the U.S. conventional forces in the area. Again, Nam describes Seoul's view of the results: "From South Korea's perspective, therefore, America's inaction might mean that in extreme cases when deterrence was most strongly needed, the practicality of the U.S. commitment would not longer be certain."[56] During his first interview after the fall of Saigon, ROK President Park declared that, "There were and still are many Koreans doubting the commitment of the United States."[57] The Nixon Doctrine asserted that the United States was guaranteeing its security commitments in Asia with a nuclear umbrella, leaving each country responsible for its own national security at lower levels of conflict. With loss of confidence in conventional support, however, America's strategic credibility

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53 Nam, *America's Commitment to South Korea*, 84.

54 Nam, *America's Commitment to South Korea*, 85.

55 Nam, *America's Commitment to South Korea*, 85.

56 Nam, *America's Commitment to South Korea*, 85.

57 Rowland Evans and Robert Novak, "Korea: Park's Inflexibility," *The Washington Post*, 12 June 1975, A-19.

also decreased in Seoul's view. No longer confident that U.S. foreign policy coincided with South Korean national security concerns, South Korea began to look for alternatives to a dwindling U.S. commitment. These were outlined in the first five year military modernization plan, and included the strengthening of the military-industrial infrastructure, the purchase and development of advanced conventional weapons, and the development of nuclear weapons.

B. THE NIXON DOCTRINE AND THE TROOP WITHDRAWALS

In July 1968, while visiting the island of Guam, President Richard M. Nixon gave a speech outlining a new policy regarding military commitments to Asian allies. Initially referred to as the *Guam Doctrine*, it later became know as the *Nixon Doctrine.* This policy called for U.S. allies in Asia to take primary responsibility for their own defense. The speech promised Asian nations that America would guarantee its security commitments in the region with a nuclear umbrella, not with conventional forces. Discussions began regarding a plan to withdraw U.S. troops from Asia, but these troops gave the nuclear security commitment credibility.[58] The withdrawal of the U.S. Seventh Division in 1971 left the Second Division, as the only U.S. unit deployed along the Demilitarized Zone. In America, however, there was a growing call for disengagement overseas. The *Nixon Doctrine* called for allies to develop a self-sufficient military. Threats beyond their capability would be dispatched by U.S. naval, air and nuclear forces. In fact, U.S. doctrine called for the use of atomic weapons against a non-nuclear state

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[58] Nam, *America's Commitment to South Korea*, 85.

(North Korea) in the case of an attack, due to the overwhelming conventional superiority that North Korea possessed at that time against the U.S. and South Korean forces on the peninsula.[59] The U.S. performance in Vietnam and the *Pueblo* incident, however, called into question the reliability of all U.S. commitments, including the nuclear guarantee.

President Park regarded the Nixon Doctrine as an opportunity to create a more secure, self-sufficient future for ROK. Seoul immediately planned to compensate for the loss of U.S. forces by developing a robust, self-reliant military. This plan even entailed developing nuclear capabilities.[60] From the South Korean perspective, development of nuclear weapons was a crucial part of national security. Seoul required more than military parity. It demanded a capability devastating enough to achieve deterrence. In fact, Young Whan Kihl makes the observations that, "Seoul would argue that the acquisition of a nuclear capability by the South is intended not so much for use against the population of North Korea as to deter North Korean threats and aggression."[61] The planned U.S. troop withdrawal increased ROK desire to develop a self-sufficient defense program.

The *Nixon Doctrine* attempted to resolve the different agendas of the United States and South Korea, but in essence gave Seoul a green light to develop a strong military. This step-down in U.S. commitment, however, was a wake up call to the

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59 Nam, *America's Commitment to South Korea*, 88.

60 Buss, *The United States and the Republic of Korea*, 52-3.

61 Young Whan Kihl, "Korea's Future: Seoul's Perspective." *Asian Survey* 17, no. 11 (November 1977): 1070.

leadership in South Korea. From Seoul's perspective, it was another indication of waning U.S. protection. A program aimed at a more self-sufficient defense capability was a wise policy. For President Park, this meant the development of a military capable of more than merely repelling a North Korean attack. Given the unpredictability of the North Korean leadership, South Korean forces had to deter the North from any attempt at attack.[62] This meant the development of a South Korean nuclear arsenal.

The status quo provided by the Cold War threats changed drastically in the 1960s and 1970s for several reasons. The American experience in Vietnam led many Asian allies to question the credibility of the U.S. commitment in Asia. During this period, the United States began working on détente with the communist powers of the world. South Korea, however, still saw communism as an unchanged threat. Washington's pursuit of relations with the Peoples' Republic of China and the Soviet Union was disconcerting to ROK, which still faced a highly aggressive communist North Korea.[63] The combination of the U.S.-Sino détente and the Sino-Soviet split led many to question the requirement for U.S. troop deployments on the Asian continent in support of Cold War threats. Many regarded the moral obligation the United States had toward South Korea and its security arrangement against North Korea as outmoded. Certainly, it was questionable whether it still paralleled U.S. national interests, as Joo-Hong Nam points out: "The problem of the American commitment to South Korea during the seventies was rooted in the sense of

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62 Nam, *America's Commitment to South Korea*, 89.

63 Clough, *Deterrence and Defense in Korea*, 22.

asymmetry between the American conception of national interest at stake in Korea and the costs it estimated to be necessary in honouring the commitment in the event of war."[64] Korea's prime position within U.S. foreign policy was changing for the worse, and Korean leaders needed a defense capability to stand in the gap that this change created.

C. THE CARTER PLAN AND KOREAGATE

During his presidential campaign, Jimmy Carter talked of withdrawing all American ground troops from the Korean peninsula. After he was elected, he began to discuss how to best put this promise into action. The administration discussed a program to remove all American forces, except some Air Force personnel, over a period of six years. The Carter withdrawal plan was proof to Seoul that Korea was losing its strategic significance to the United States. Sungjoo Han states that:

> President Carter's decision to withdraw all U.S. ground forces from Korea by 1982 confirmed what the South Korean government had already suspected for some time: that the Korean peninsula was gradually losing its military importance in the American global strategic thinking; and that Seoul's near-blind faith in the United States as a guarantor of its security should be radically reappraised.[65]

The United States had been the mainstay of South Korean defense against Pyongyang since the Korean War. Deterrence, rather than the ability to defend the

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[64] Nam, *America's Commitment to South Korea*, 5.

[65] Sungjoo Han, "South Korea 1977: Preparing for Self-Reliance." *Asian Survey* 18, no. 1 (January 1978): 45.

peninsula was the top priority for Seoul.[66] Could they accomplish this without American forces?

President Carter's plan met with criticism from all sides. Those who agreed with the Carter Plan argued that maintaining troops in Korea would ensure automatic U.S. involvement in a land war in Asia when South Korea no longer possessed sufficient strategic value for the U.S. ground troops there to serve as a tripwire. Supporters also believed that both the Soviet Union and the Peoples' Republic of China would restrain North Korea from invading, and that the strong South Korean economy could provide for its own national defense. In an armed conflict, the United States would be able to support South Korea using naval and air forces, without having to maintain ground troops on the peninsula. Last, those in Carter's camp believed that the continuing political repression and socioeconomic injustice made South Korea unworthy of defense by American troops.[67]

Those who disagreed with the plan argued that since there was a serious military imbalance between North and South Korea, a premature withdrawal of the U.S. troops would tempt the aggressive and unpredictable regime in Pyongyang to attack the South, and could at the very least, lead the two Koreas into an expensive and dangerous arms race which might include the development of nuclear capabilities. The ax murder of two American officers on 18 August 1976 by North Korean guards while clearing vegetation

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[66] Buss, *The United States and the Republic of Korea*, 54.

[67] Han, "South Korea 1977: Preparing for Self-Reliance," 47.

in the Joint Security Area (JSA) in Panmunjom is a clear example of the unpredictability of the regime in the North. Similarly erratic actions periodically reaffirm this observation.[68] This fact further reinforced the need for a credible deterrence force provided by the United States. If this were not provided it would have to be replaced by an indigenous one, even if that meant the development of a nuclear arsenal.

It was also believed that U.S. disengagement in Korea could create Japanese doubts about the credibility of U.S. security commitments to their own county, possibly leading them to pursue rearmament or accommodation with the Soviet Union. Critics believed that the Carter plan would deprive the United States and ROK of the opportunity to bargain with the communists for the stabilization of the Korean situation, and would have a serious negative effect on South Korea's continued economic growth and political liberalization. Last, the plan would result in the transfer of operational command of the ROK armed forces to South Korea, making it more difficult to control the military situation on the Korean peninsula.[69]

Many in the U.S. military, Congress, and the government in Seoul disagreed with the plan to remove ground forces from the Korean peninsula. Major General John K. Singlaub, the Chief of Staff of the American forces in Korea publicly criticized Carter's plan to withdraw forces, saying that it amounted to an, "invitation to the world to expect

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[68] Buss, *The United States and the Republic of Korea*, 91. Other examples include the assassination attempt on President Park Chung-Hee, which resulted in the death of his wife (see Oberdorfer) and the bombing of KAL Flight 858 by two North Korean spy-terrorists, which killed 115 people. A first hand account of the bombing is chronicled by the female half of the team that conducted the bombing, in Kim Hyun-Hee's, *The Tears of My Soul*, (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1993).

[69] Han, "South Korea 1977: Preparing for Self-Reliance," 47.

an inevitable war."[70] President Carter recalled him to Washington and reassigned him. This event fanned the flames of critics in Congress and elsewhere.[71] Carter planned to reaffirm U.S. naval and air support and the nuclear umbrella and provide a $1.8 billion package in military equipment.[72] The Carter administration was convinced that South Korea could defend itself, especially given its rapid economic growth, which would enable it to fund a technically advanced military. Seoul interpreted the planned removal of the U.S. troops and tactical nuclear weapons from South Korea as weakened commitment and deterrence. Young Whan Kihl elaborates, "South Korea will feel insecure if the Carter policy of removing U.S. tactical nuclear weapons from Korea is realized. Seoul naturally hopes-but is not likely-to inherit some of the nuclear weapons equipment and warheads from the U.S. forces in Korea."[73] Although the transfer of U.S. nuclear weapons would have been unlikely, the House Appropriations Committee recommended the transfer of Hawk, Nike-Hercules and nuclear capable Sergeant and Honest John missiles to the South Korean military.[74] South Korean President Park Chung-Hee was heard suggesting that ROK might push for the development of its own nuclear weapons if the United States removed its tactical nuclear weapons and troops

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[70] Edward Walsh and George C. Wilson, "President Defends His Korea Policy: Push to Develop Nuclear Weapons Hinted In Seoul." *The Washington Post*, 27 May 1977, A-1.

[71] Han, "South Korea 1977: Preparing for Self-Reliance," 46.

[72] Chang-yoon Choi, "Korea: Security and Strategic Issues." *Asian Survey* 20, no. 11 (November 1980): 1132.

[73] Young. "Korea's Future," 1069.

[74] Young. "Korea's Future," 1069.

from South Korea. Park's aid was quoted as saying, "As a matter of principle we should have the freedom to take necessary actions within our ability to ensure our survival. As to the question of nuclear weapons development, we would consider the matter on that basis."[75]

Dissent from Congress and the Department of Defense ultimately halted Carter's plan. The consensus was that the U.S. presence did play an irreplaceable role in deterring North Korea, and maintaining a precarious balance that involved all nations in Northeast Asia. According to Chang –yoon Choi:

> U.S. forces have been an excellent bargaining chip with which the U.S. could coax the North Korean leadership into an accommodation with the South. In that sense, President Carter would have thrown away the biggest bargaining advantage for bringing about a political settlement in Korea...eventually the South might be forced to develop a nuclear weapons capability. That, in turn, would almost certainly trigger similar efforts on the part of North Korea, Taiwan, and Japan.[76]

U.S. ground forces in Korea prevented a possible nuclear domino effect in East Asia.

The *Park Tong-sun Affair,* exposed in 1977, and later renamed *Koreagate*, was a South Korean attempt to influence government officials and media representatives in favor of South Korean policy priorities. Two simultaneous investigations resulted: one by the House Committee on Standards and Official Conduct and one by the Justice Department.[77] The investigation initially indicted three individuals. Charges included

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[75] Walsh, "President Defends His Korea Policy: Push to Develop Nuclear Weapons Hinted In Seoul,"A-1.

[76] Choi, "Korea: Security and Strategic Issues," 1135.

[77] Han, "South Korea 1977: Preparing for Self-Reliance,"48-9.

using millions of dollars in an attempt to influence officials. Richard T. Hanna, was a former Congressman, Kim Han-Cho, was a Korean-American, and Park Tong-sun, was a Korean citizen and the main figure in the affair.[78] Park returned to Korea and South Korean officials did not allow him to be extradited nor for him to be questioned by U.S. investigators. Sungjoo Han points out the details of these strained relations:

> South Korea's reluctance to comply with the requests of the U.S. investigators produced a serious strain in relations between the two countries. In mid October, U.S. Justice Department officials, headed by Assistant Attorney General Benjamin Civiletti, failed to reach an agreement with the ROK officials on the question of Park Tong-sun's return despite four days of negotiation in Seoul. Immediately afterwards, the House Committee on International Relations refused even to consider President Carter's request to authorize the transfer of $800 million worth of weapons to South Korea until South Korea was less adamant about Park Tong-sun's return.[79]

During the investigations, the South Korean reluctance to provide witnesses was undermined by several high level defectors who testified before the investigating House committee. Among these was the head of the Korean Central Intelligence Agency (KCIA) from 1963 to 1969, Kim Hyung-Wook.[80] An unexpected bonus of these defections was detailed information on the nuclear weapons program that had been underway in the mid 1970s. This information included plans to acquire not only

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[78] Han, "South Korea 1977: Preparing for Self-Reliance,"48.

[79] Han, "South Korea 1977: Preparing for Self-Reliance,"49.

[80] Han, "South Korea 1977: Preparing for Self-Reliance,"49.

fissionable material, but also reprocessing facilities, and other components required for assembling a weapon.[81]

D. THE ROK NUCLEAR PROGRAM AND U.S. REACTIONS

A declassified document that chronicles a conversation between President John F. Kennedy and President Park Chung-Hee in 1961 gives a hint at early ROK interest in a nuclear program: "Kennedy asked Pak if Korea has considered atomic power generation. Pak replies no, that at this point, it is too expensive a proposal, but, smiling, says it would be possible with financial help from the U.S."[82] Was the only barrier for Seoul at that time financial? Both Japan and North Korea had already embarked on programs of their own. Certainly, a nuclear power program, although too expensive at that point, must have been considered by the ROK leadership. In 1961, South Korea was at the beginning of a period of great economic growth. A nuclear power program may have been too much of an economic burden at that time, but it would soon become possible, especially given the right motive: a drastically changing strategic environment coupled with new American policies toward Asian allies.

Plans for the ROK nuclear weapons program began after the July 1968 announcement of the Nixon Doctrine. President Park Chung-Hee had been anxious to

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[81] Leonard S. Spector. *Nuclear Proliferation Today*. (New York: Vintage Books, 1984), 341.

[82] *Memorandum of Conversation,* Washington, November 14, 1961, 3:30-4:50 p.m. //Source: Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Countries Series, Korea, Park Visit, 11/61-12/61. (Secret: Declassified). Drafted by Koren and approved in S on December 5 and in the Department of Defense on December 6. The closing time of the meeting, which was held in the White House, is from the President's Appointment Book. (Ibid.) Extensive briefing material for Pak's visit is ibid., National Security Files, Countries Series, Korea, Park Visit, 11/61-12/61, and ibid., Park Briefing Book, 11/14/61-11/15/61, Parts I-III.

exercise more independence from the United States. The tenets of the Nixon Doctrine gave Park the justification to undertake massive modernization of the military in South Korea. During the 1970s, South Korea adopted two five-year military modernization programs, the Modernization of the Republic of Korea Army (1971-1976) and the Five-Year Force Improvement Plan, which began in 1975. ROK designed these programs to compensate for the Nixon Doctrine and the removal of the U.S. Seventh Infantry Division from South Korea in 1971. Among the goals of these programs were the development and acquisition of advanced conventional weapons, the expansion of Korea's technological infrastructure, and the development of an independent nuclear capability.[83] The United States funded the adoption of the massive military modernization programs by Seoul in an attempt to compensate for the loss of conventional U.S. forces in Korea. Between 1971 and 1975, the United States instituted a total of $1.5 billion in aid packages to South Korea.[84] Having no nuclear reactors or significant civilian power program yet, plans for nuclear development were embryonic in the early 1970s. For Seoul, however, the military modernization program also included plans to compensate for the possible loss of the U.S. nuclear umbrella.[85]

Although the U.S. military presence in South Korea was vital for ROK security, America's reasons for remaining there were diminishing. To replace this capability, the

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[83] Young. "Korea's Future," 1065.

[84] Nam, *America's Commitment to South Korea*, 101.

[85] Young. "Korea's Future," 1065.

Modernization of the Republic of Korea Army and subsequent Five-Year Force Improvement Plan included both the purchase of modern weapons and technology from overseas, and the eventual development of nuclear weapons. A 12 June 1975 article in *The Washington Post* reported that Park, for the first time, confirmed that South Korea had the capability to go nuclear and that it would do so if abandoned by the United States. He also stated that ROK was honoring the NPT.[86] Later, Park confirmed this in a statement made in an interview on 26 June 1975 with *The Washington Post*, saying that South Korea, "would do anything necessary to insure its survival including development of nuclear weapons...if the U.S. nuclear umbrella is withdrawn."[87] In fact, Young points out that the nuclear plan was of very high priority and designed to provide a virtual nuclear capability:

> Seoul may reason that it must maintain, as a minimum, a nuclear option such as the one enjoyed by Israel and Japan which can, with short notice, be easily changed to a war footing that could manufacture nuclear warheads and missiles. Seoul appears to have made a decision to 'go nuclear' in the long run...That South Korea is a signatory power of the nuclear nonproliferation treaty does not deter it from pursuing the policy of preparing for the contingency of nuclear development.[88]

Park's announcement in 1975 regarding the nuclear program referred to ROK acquisition of civilian technology. Part of this build up, in addition to the U.S. sponsored reactors that went online in 1975, included the purchase of a French built nuclear fuel

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[86] Evans, "Korea: Park's Inflexibility," A-19.

[87] Young. "Korea's Future," 1065-8.

[88] Young. "Korea's Future," 1067.

reprocessing plant. This would allow ROK to separate weapons grade plutonium from spent fuel rods using a chemical process. Also included in planned purchases was a Canadian Candu reactor, allowing for greater plutonium production, and similar to the one used by India in building its atomic explosive in 1974.[89] It was also asserted by both Korean and Western diplomatic sources that ROK scientists already had the technical expertise to build a nuclear weapon.[90] After the cancellation of the purchase of the French built reprocessing plant, the Korea Atomic Energy Research Institute (KAERI) still had plans to build a fuel fabrication facility and experimental chemical reprocessing plant at a cost of $4 million. The ROK government's long term goal was an annual refining and converting capacity of 300 tons of uranium.[91] In 1976, South Korea possessed approximately one thousand atomic scientists, 600 of which worked at KEARI.[92] An article by Carson Mark documents successful tests made by Lawrence Livermore Nuclear Laboratory in 1962 using a reactor grade plutonium warhead.[93] This indicates that a reprocessing facility is unnecessary to design and build a weapon.[94]

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89 "Seoul Officials Say Strong U.S. Pressure Forced Cancellation of Plans." *The New York Times*, 1 February 1996, A-11.

90 "Seoul Officials Say Strong U.S. Pressure Forced Cancellation of Plans," A-11.

91 Young-Sun Ha, "Nuclearization of Small States and World Order: The Case of Korea," *Asian Survey* 18, no. 11 (November 1978): 1134,8.

92 Ha, "Nuclearization of Small States and World Order: The Case of Korea," 1134,8.

93 Senate Committee on Governmental Affairs, *Nuclear Proliferation Factbook*, 550.

94 W. J. Lanouette, "N-Power: Carter Holds the Key," *Far Eastern Economic Review* 99, no. 1 (6 January 1978):22.

After public exposure of the program, U.S. officials and diplomats focused on halting the development of nuclear weapons in South Korea. Declassified memoranda show that this involved the possibility of withholding financial aid packages and civilian nuclear technology vital to Seoul's nuclear power program.[95] The United States also pressured France at the highest levels to cancel its deal with ROK.[96] Seoul talked no more of nuclear weapons development and received its military and nuclear technology aid packages on schedule.

Later reports reveal, however, that the program continued. As late as 1978 Park said that a Korean nuclear weapons program was ninety-five percent complete.[97] The same year, an article in *Far Eastern Economic Review* referred to South Korea and Pakistan as being within four to six years of the technical capability of detonating a nuclear weapon.[98]

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[95] *Cable* on ROK nuclear fuel reprocessing plan, (Washington, D.C.: State Department, 30 June 1975) Document: 0308, Declassified 6 September 1994. Talking points in this cable suggest that it be noted to ROK officials that the issue of an export-import bank loan for the ROK is before Congress, and that it may very well be disapproved unless concerns regarding reprocessing and storage of fissile materials from spent fuels are satisfied. Difficulties are anticipated with the loan unless ROK terminates its plans to acquire a pilot reprocessing plant. Also, *Memorandum* from Jan M. Lodal and Dave Elliott, to Secretary Kissinger. (Washington, D.C.: National Security Council, 24 July 1975) Declassified 13 June 1995. Discussed withholding U.S. peaceful nuclear assistance unless French deal is halted.

[96] *Memorandum* from John A. Froebe, Jr., to Secretary Kissinger. (Washington D.C.: National Security Council, 11 July 1975) Document: 0428, Declassified 1 June 1995. Suggestion that U.S. should halt sale of reprocessing equipment through pressure on the French at high levels.

[97] "S. Korea Said To Have Almost Had A-Bomb In Late '70's," (Seoul: *Kyodo News International, Inc*, 5 October 1995) Available online through Lexis Nexis.

[98] Lanouette, "N-Power: Carter Holds the Key,"22.

E. CONCLUSION

Seoul viewed Vietnam as proof of the decreasing strategic significance of Asian allies to the United States. The official U.S. policy during this period, the Nixon Doctrine, called for greater ROK self-reliance, particularly concerning national security and defense. Yet, given the role of U.S. forces in the past, which included a nuclear facet of both extended deterrence and tactical nuclear weapons deployed on the peninsula, this required ROK to develop nuclear weapons of their own. The U.S. nuclear umbrella is important in both deterring North Korea from attack and in preventing a ROK nuclear weapons program. However, it is only credible in conjunction with a U.S. troop presence.

Carter's plan to withdraw American troops from the peninsula was not only destabilizing for Seoul, but as the debate on the issue ensued, it suggested Korea's decreasing priority in U.S. foreign policy. The planned withdrawal of American forces from Korea would prompt South Korea to develop a nuclear arsenal, according to statements made by President Park.[99] Many at the time argued for a Korean peninsula nuclear free zone. South Korea, with its investment in nuclear technology and an ongoing weapons program would have strongly resisted this idea unless the United States were willing to sign a treaty assuring that aggression in Korea by the Soviet Union or Peoples' Republic of China (PRC) would be countered by the United States. Given the goals of

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[99] Evans, "Korea: Park's Inflexibility," A-19.

the Nixon Doctrine and the withdrawal itself, this was unlikely.[100] George F. Will writes of changed Asian perceptions shortly after the fall of Saigon: "Many nations have based their security plans on the assumption that the United States has the will to make its power an actuality. Now these nations may conclude that it is prudent to assume the worst about the willingness of the United States to make its power felt."[101] This situation is what led ROK to come so close to developing nuclear weapons.

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[100] Young. "Korea's Future: Seoul's Perspective," 1070.

[101] George F. Will, "When Power is Not Power," *The Washington Post*, 3 May 1975, A-19.

IV. NORDPOLITIK AND THE NUCLEAR CRISIS

A. NORDPOLITIK AND THE FALL OF COMMUNISM

Seoul's policy of Nordpolitik in the 1980s and the subsequent fall of the majority of the communist world had a significant impact on ROK views on national defense the security role of the United States. It had a similarly negative impact on Pyongyang, isolating North Korea from its only remaining allies. Nordpolitik, or Seoul's plan to normalize relations with the communist world, originated with ROK Foreign Minister, Lee Bum Suk in 1983. He called the policy, Nordpolitik, or "northern politics," after the West German Ostpolitik.[102] Before the PRC had implemented the economic reforms that would come in the late 1980s and before the era of new thinking in the former Soviet Union, South Korea sought diplomatic and economic relations with communist states. Nordpolitik was to open economic ties with the Soviet Union, the Peoples' Republic of China, and other communist nations. Nordpolitik provided Seoul with an avenue leading to a more prominent international image in the realms of politics and trade.

South Korea also sought to prevent its new relations with China and the Soviet Union from alarming the government in Pyongyang. Previously, ROK policies had aimed at the alienation and isolation of the DPRK from as many countries as possible.[103] Nordpolitik was a policy designed to bring Pyongyang out of isolation and into the

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[102] Oberdorfer, *The Two Koreas*, 187.

[103] Oberdorfer, *The Two Koreas*, 187.

international community. Seoul hoped that bringing North Korea into an open forum would allow for better negotiations between the two Koreas.

Nordpolitik ushered in a new diplomatic era for ROK. While its relations with the United States previously dominated Seoul's decisions, Nordpolitik acknowledged the new position ROK played within the Asian strategic balance even before the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the Cold War. Seoul's client status was obsolete. The independence that ROK leadership desired could become a reality. The communist world was changing and the role that the United States played within the now very economically capable South Korea also was different. Seoul's courtship of the communist world not only indicated a relative decrease in importance of the U.S. role on the peninsula, but also displayed South Korea's decreasing concern for communist world support for North Korea. In the post-Cold War environment, Washington's ability to influence Seoul decreased. No longer did the United States wield the power it had in the 1970s when ROK had last attempted to develop nuclear weapons.

Seoul designed Nordpolitik to warm relations with the PRC and the Soviet Union while simultaneously minimizing any threat that Pyongyang would perceive. In fact, it only emphasized Seoul's diplomatic and economic advantage over Pyongyang. South Korea was gaining international status through a burgeoning economy and through events such as hosting the 1986 Asian Games and the 1988 Olympics. The timing of Nordpolitik could not have been better. In the PRC, Deng Xiao Ping was encouraging market oriented reforms and opening trade. Gorbachev's "new thinking" campaign was changing the economic outlook in the Soviet Union. Seoul established formal diplomatic

ties with the Russian Republic in 1990 and with the PRC in 1992. Paul H. B. Godwin summarizes the gravity of South Korean relations with the PRC:

> China's own position on the peninsula was most clearly stated by the expansion of its trade and commercial relationship with the ROK, and the 1992 establishment of full diplomatic relations between Beijing and Seoul. The ROK's contribution to China's economic development goals is seen as far more important than the ideological ties binding Pyongyang and Beijing, even at a time when the Chinese leadership sees all socialist states as under siege from the corrosive Western strategy of 'peaceful evolution'."[104]

Edward Olsen reaches a similar conclusion about Gorbachev's meetings with ROK President Roh Tae-Woo in Moscow, Cheju Do and San Francisco and the establishment of diplomatic ties in 1992: "Those developments and the promise of continued improvements in ROK-Russian ties almost certainly has sealed North Korea's diplomatic fate."[105] Seoul was expanding its diplomatic relations to the allies of North Korea while Pyongyang had made little progress with Japan or the United States, South Korea's main allies. Time has reinforced this victory. In 1995, Chinese President Jiang Zemin made a state visit to South Korea and was the first head of state from the PRC to set foot in ROK. In contrast, no Chinese head of state has ever visited North Korea.[106] Nordpolitik may have made provision for assuring the DPRK of Seoul's good intentions, but its success only further isolated Pyongyang.

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[104] Paul H.B. Godwin, "China's Asian Policy in the 1990s: Adjusting to the Post-Cold War Environment," in *East Asian Security in the Post-Cold War Era*, ed. Sheldon W. Simon (Armonk, New York: M. E. Sharpe, Inc, 1993), 132.

[105] Edward A. Olsen, "The Diplomatic Dimensions of the Korean Confrontation," in *East Asian Security in the Post-Cold War Era*, ed. Sheldon W. Simon (Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, Inc, 1993), 106.

[106] B. C. Koh, "South Korea in 1995: Tremors of Transition," *Asian Survey* 36, no. 1 (Jan 1996): 59.

South Korea's new policy toward the communist world and the end of the Cold War caused several changes. Realization of a changing strategic environment in the 1980s and a desire to capitalize on that change led Seoul to its Nordpolitik policy. The U.S. position in Asia and in the affairs on the Korean peninsula decreased in terms of the influence it wielded despite statements to the contrary. Although the United States still held the title as the cornerstone of security on the Korean peninsula, some South Koreans no longer thought of it that way. As ROK achieved more independence, some believed that statements highlighting America's continuing dominant role in Korean security were merely attempts to limit the divergence in U.S. and ROK interests.[107] In the past, these problems had been resolved by the U.S. dominance in U.S.-ROK relations. That same level of influence no longer existed.

In addition, South Korea's courtship of the PRC and the Soviet Union caused great anxiety in North Korea, in spite of measures taken to prevent such a reaction. Kim Il-Sung's rejection of ROK messages that were relayed via Gorbachev makes it clear that this tactic by Seoul was suspect in the North. The great success of Seoul's program of normalization with China and Russia turned North Korea's diplomatic world upside-down. South Korea gained a great deal in opening these relations. Economically it was a benefit, and brought Seoul new international status. Nordpolitik, the Olympic Games and the fall of the communist world all contributed to Seoul's gaining a foothold with new allies and economic partners while these same countries began to pull away from North

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[107] Olsen, "The Diplomatic Dimensions of the Korean Confrontation," 110.

Korea. An excerpt from a Beijing newspaper celebrating the fifth anniversary of PRC-ROK relations emphasizes the ROK role on the peninsula vice that of North Korea: "The Chinese people and the ROK people have had a history of friendly exchanges for over 2,000 years. Due to historical reasons, such exchanges had once been suspended for nearly half a century."[108] While economically beneficial to ROK, Seoul's new relations might have prompted Pyongyang to begin its nuclear weapons program in an attempt to compensate for the perceived loss of Chinese and Russian support. Not only had North Korea lost support from these allies, but ROK had gained that very same help. Revolutionary world trends had combined with innovative ROK foreign policy successes to erode North Korea's international position since 1985.[109] It was during this very same period that Pyongyang stepped up its bid to become a nuclear power.

B. THE NORTH KOREAN NUCLEAR CRISIS

Since 1987, both military analysts and politicians have feared the possibility of a nuclear-armed North Korea.[110] North Korea signed the NPT in 1985 at the behest of the Soviet Union.[111] Pyongyang's interest in nuclear capability spans back to the bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki and to U.S. atomic diplomacy during the Korean

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108 FBIS-CHI-97-251, 25 August 97.

109 Olsen, "The Diplomatic Dimensions of the Korean Confrontation," 111.

110 Matthias Dembinski, "North Korea, IAEA Special Inspections, and the Future of the Nonproliferation Regime," *The Nonproliferation Review* 2, no. 2 (Winter 1995): 31.

111 Reiss, *Bridled Ambition*, 285.

War.[112] Beginning in 1956, North Korean scientists received training in the Soviet Union. In addition, in 1959, the Soviet Union transferred a small research reactor and other equipment to North Korea. In 1965, a decade after the initial receipt of help from the U.S.S.R., North Korea received another larger research reactor from the Soviet Union. This unit became operational in 1967 near the site that later became known as the Yongbyon facility.[113] The same year, North Korea discovered large deposits of uranium.[114]

During the 1970s, the North Korean nuclear infrastructure grew to include enrichment technology and weapons design. Among these facilities were a uranium mill and a purification plant designed to concentrate ore into "yellowcake," and a fuel rod fabrication facility.[115] In 1980, North Korea began construction of a 30-megawatt (thermal) graphite-moderated reactor running on natural uranium.[116] This reactor, located at Yongbyon, began operating in 1986 and was a Calder Hall type reactor, designed to burn natural uranium at a low rate, producing a high proportion of plutonium-

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[112] Dembinski, "North Korea, IAEA Special Inspections, and the Future of the Nonproliferation Regime," 32.

[113] Alexandre Y. Monsourov, "The Origins, Evolution and Current Politics of the North Korean Nuclear Program," *The Nonproliferation Review* 2, no. 3 (Spring/Summer 1995): 26.

[114] Mazarr, *North Korea and the Bomb*, 25.

[115] Monsourov, "The Origins, Evolution and Current Politics of the North Korean Nuclear Program," 26; also, Senate Committee on Governmental Affairs, *Nuclear Proliferation Factbook*, 607. Through the process of milling, uranium ore, containing only a small percentage of uranium oxide (U_3O_8) is converted into material containing a high percentage (80 percent) of U_3O_8. This is often referred to as "yellowcake".

[116] Dembinski, "North Korea, IAEA Special Inspections, and the Future of the Nonproliferation Regime," 33.

239 in its spent fuel rods compared to a light-water power reactor. This facility was ideal for producing material for a weapons program.[117] The absence of power lines connecting the facility to a power grid made the project even more suspicious.[118]

Alexandre Y. Monsourov traces Kim Il-Sung's nuclear ambitions and the rapid expansion of Pyongyang's nuclear weapons program in the late 1970s to four major events since 1945: the use of the bomb on Japan to force a quick surrender, the consideration by the United States to use nuclear weapons during the Korean War, the Cuban missile crisis and the ROK nuclear weapons program that was pursued in the 1970s.[119] Japan's surrender following two nuclear strikes made a huge impression on Kim after the fierce and largely unsuccessful fighting he had participated in against the Japanese.[120] Learning later, that the United States had seriously contemplated using nuclear weapons in Korea forced Kim to confront the requirement for assistance against such a capability. This realization resulted in North Korea signing the Alliance Treaties on Friendship, Cooperation, and Mutual Assistance with both the Soviet Union and the

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[117] Reiss, *Bridled Ambition*, 234.

[118] Monsourov, "The Origins, Evolution and Current Politics of the North Korean Nuclear Program," 28.

[119] Monsourov, "The Origins, Evolution and Current Politics of the North Korean Nuclear Program," 28-9.

[120] This author concedes that there are alternate explanations regarding the Japanese surrender. See Robert A. Pape, "Why Japan Surrendered," *International Security* 18, no. 2 (Fall 1993): 154-201. These arguments are compelling and may in fact be correct. For the purposes of this thesis, however, what is important is the perception, by Kim Il-Sung, and others, that the atomic bomb ended the war. This view is argued by Barton J. Bernstein, "Correspondence: Letter to the Editor," *International Security* 16, no. 3 (Winter 1991/2): 204-21.

PRC in 1961, bringing the DPRK under these respective nuclear umbrellas.[121] Kim viewed the Cuban missile crisis as a Soviet sellout of a close ally, leading him to question the reliability of the Soviet nuclear umbrella promised to North Korea. An indigenous capability would give North Korea greater autonomy over strategic defense. Kim authorized a review of North Korea's nuclear policies, but still refrained from developing nuclear weapons.[122] Evidence of Seoul's nuclear weapons program in the 1970s, the introduction of the TEAM SPIRIT exercises and evidence of U.S. tactical nuclear weapons on the peninsula prompted Kim to launch a nuclear weapons program in the late 1970s.[123]

In September of 1974, North Korea joined the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). In 1977, North Korea signed an agreement with the IAEA that required the monitoring of its two small research reactors.[124] As North Korea's nuclear program progressed, the international community became concerned that Pyongyang might use this growing nuclear capability as a stepping stone to nuclear weapons development. The Soviet Union convinced North Korea to sign the Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) in December of 1985. It was not until April of 1992, however, that the North Korean

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[121] Monsourov, "The Origins, Evolution and Current Politics of the North Korean Nuclear Program," 28. Although the PRC did not have a nuclear capability in 1961, the above agreement brought the DPRK under the future Chinese umbrella, which was developed later that decade.

[122] Monsourov, "The Origins, Evolution and Current Politics of the North Korean Nuclear Program," 28

[123] Monsourov, "The Origins, Evolution and Current Politics of the North Korean Nuclear Program," 28

[124] Monsourov, "The Origins, Evolution and Current Politics of the North Korean Nuclear Program," 26.

government finally ratified the nuclear safeguards agreement.[125] This occurred after the United States declared the removal of all tactical nuclear weapons from the Korean peninsula.[126] In addition, ROK President Roh Tae-Woo stated that South Korea would not seek to produce nuclear weapons.[127] In 1992, both North and South Korea signed a Joint Denuclearization Declaration agreeing to make the peninsula free of nuclear weapons and to forego development of a reprocessing and enrichment capability.[128] Traditionally, the IAEA safeguards had been limited to the inspection of declared facilities, making it possible to circumvent them by reprocessing material at undisclosed sites.[129] It was this possibility in North Korea that produced the IAEA request for special inspections of undeclared nuclear facilities and activities. The DPRK had started construction of a facility that would allow scientists to extract plutonium from spent

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125 Dembinski, "North Korea, IAEA Special Inspections, and the Future of the Nonproliferation Regime," 33.

126 Reiss, *Bridled Ambition*, 238.

127 Sam Jameson, "No A-Arms For South Korea, Leader Pledges," *The New York Times*, 14 November 1993, A-8.

128 Reiss, *Bridled Ambition*, 286.

129 Dembinski, "North Korea, IAEA Special Inspections, and the Future of the Nonproliferation Regime," 32.

nuclear fuel via a chemical process known as PUREX.[130] In May of 1992, the IAEA performed its first inspections on the nuclear facilities at Yongbyon.[131]

During the initial series of inspections, the IAEA officials found evidence of North Korea's noncompliance with its NPT obligations. This occurred in each of the first six inspections, leading the inspectors to recommend special inspections, which would allow for access to undeclared facilities. In reaction to the request for special inspections, Pyongyang decided to withdraw from the NPT regime in March of 1993.[132] The United States pursued negotiations with North Korea to clear up the matter quickly. Meetings between the United States and the DPRK, which took place in Geneva in June of 1993, reinforced Seoul's feelings of isolation and fear that U.S.-DPRK relations were progressing without ROK participation.[133] In exchange for resumption of IAEA inspections, Pyongyang demanded economic and technical assistance for its nuclear power program and diplomatic recognition from the United States. During the first two rounds of talks, the United States went from demanding a total freeze of North Korea's nuclear program to offering limited rewards in exchange for regaining permission for the

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130 Senate Committee on Governmental Affairs, *Nuclear Proliferation Factbook*, 605. PUREX is the abbreviation for Plutonium U{R}ranium E{X}traction. A solvent extraction process commonly used in fuel processing that individually separates the uranium from the accompanying fission products contained in irradiated fuel.

131 Monsourov, "The Origins, Evolution and Current Politics of the North Korean Nuclear Program," 27.

132 Monsourov, "The Origins, Evolution and Current Politics of the North Korean Nuclear Program," 27.

133 Young-Shik Kim, "South Korea-U.S. Relations and North Korea: A Cleavage In Their Approaches and Perspectives," *Korea and World Affairs* 20 no. 4 (Fall 1996):480.

IAEA to conduct safeguard inspections of North Korean facilities.[134] U.S. experts estimated that the reactor had been shut down in 1989 and that the entire core had been replaced, providing North Korean scientists with enough spent nuclear fuel to produce two bombs.[135] Pyongyang admitted to extracting a small amount of plutonium from these rods for research purposes. U.S. intelligence organizations believed this was enough fissionable material to construct at least one bomb, although some estimates stated as many as five.[136]

After pursing a flexible approach to the North Korean problem, the United States eventually convinced Pyongyang to allow IAEA inspections to resume. On 1 March 1994, these inspections began. The officials immediately discovered that a seal on the reprocessing plant had been broken and the inspectors could not tour locations that had been previously included as inspection sites. This meant that the IAEA could no longer determine if North Korean scientists had diverted fuel to a secret weapons program. North Korean scientists had discharged the reactor, making it impossible to reconstruct the history of the fuel cycle.[137] A new phase in the crisis was beginning, with

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134 Dembinski, "North Korea, IAEA Special Inspections, and the Future of the Nonproliferation Regime," 31.

135 Dembinski, "North Korea, IAEA Special Inspections, and the Future of the Nonproliferation Regime," 33.

136 Young Whan Kihl. "Confrontation or Compromise? Lessons from the 1994 Crisis," in *Peace and Security in Northeast Asia: The Nuclear Issue and the Korean Peninsula*, eds. Young Whan Kihl and Peter Hayes (Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1997): 182.

137 Dembinski, "North Korea, IAEA Special Inspections, and the Future of the Nonproliferation Regime," 35.

Washington attempting to reach an agreement by providing carrots. South Korean officials requested that the United States not resume high-level talks with North Korea unless Pyongyang agreed to full nuclear inspections.[138] During talks in Pyongyang on 19 March 1994, a North Korean negotiator made threatening remarks about turning Seoul into a fireball. In April, the North Korean Army Chief of Staff, Choe Gwang, accused the United States, Japan, and South Korea of provoking the North and said that his army would annihilate them. The United States and ROK heightened the defense posture in response to these remarks and planned to deploy Patriot anti-aircraft missiles to South Korea.[139] Washington began forming a coalition of states to impose sanctions against the DPRK, while ROK insisted on firm but gradual actions. In the face of impending sanctions, North Korea declared its immediate withdrawal from the IAEA on 13 June 1994.[140]

To defuse the impasse over the nuclear negotiations that occurred in the spring of 1994, former President Jimmy Carter traveled to Pyongyang to meet with Kim Il-Sung. Although Carter stopped in Seoul, visiting the U.S. ambassador James Laney, General Gary Luck, Commander of U.S. Forces, Korea and President Kim Young-Sam, before moving on to North Korea, his visit to Pyongyang made many in the South anxious. South Koreans feared that the cunning Kim Il-Sung would manipulate Carter into making

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[138] Cameron W. Barr, "S. Koreans Uneasy Over U.S. Tack On North's Intransigence," *Christian Science Monitor*, 31 May 1994. Available online at [http://plweb.csmonitor.com].

[139] Young, "Confrontation or Compromise? Lessons from the 1994 Crisis,"182.

concessions.[141] Indeed, Carter made promises and statements that were contrary to the desires of the Clinton administration while conducting talks to resolve the crisis. Although delayed until the autumn of 1994 due to the death of Kim Il-Sung, Carter's negotiations led to the continuation of talks and ultimately to the Agreed Framework.

The United States and the DPRK signed the Agreed Framework on 21 October 1994. Although the United States consulted with the ROK government during negotiations for the deal, there remains a negative feeling in South Korea regarding the Agreed Framework. Many in the United States also regard it as a weak agreement.[142] The Agreed Framework resulted in the DPRK freezing its nuclear program and reaffirming its membership in the NPT. Included in the freeze was the halt of the construction of planned 50 megawatt (thermal) and 200 megawatt (thermal) reactors and the securing of the chemical reprocessing facility.[143] What North Korea gained from this deal is just as important. Economically, it gained the equivalent of $4.5 billion, including the construction of two light-water reactors, the transfer of advanced western technology, the pledge of a ten year supply of oil until the new reactors are operational and the easing

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[140] Dembinski, "North Korea, IAEA Special Inspections, and the Future of the Nonproliferation Regime," 36.

[141] Young, "Confrontation or Compromise? Lessons from the 1994 Crisis,"194.

[142] Monsourov, "The Origins, Evolution and Current Politics of the North Korean Nuclear Program," 25.

[143] State Department, "Fact sheet on U.S.-Democratic People's Republic of Korea Agreed Framework," (Washington D. C.:Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, 1996). Available online at [http:/www.acda.gov].

of the economic embargo.[144] A consortium consisting of the United States, Japan and South Korea, called the Korean Peninsula Energy Development program (KEDO) will oversee the construction of the two light-water reactors in North Korea. ROK will design and build the reactors and shoulder most of the cost, with some help from Japan.[145]

Politically, North Korea was able to open diplomatic ties with the United States and other countries, break out of its self-imposed isolation, and join several international organizations.[146] This allowed the North to catch up to ROK in terms of political and diplomatic status, a battle it had been losing since South Korea had implemented Nordpolitik. The Agreed Framework also refers to a commitment on the part of the United States and the DPRK to establish full diplomatic relations at the ambassadorial level.[147] The United States has provided a negative security assurance to the DPRK: a pledge not to use nuclear weapons against North Korea as long as it remains a member in good standing of the NPT regime.[148] Although not specifically addressed in the agreement, the crisis led to the indefinite cancellation of the TEAM SPIRIT military exercise.[149] These conciliatory actions, however, did not establish a requirement for

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[144] Monsourov, "The Origins, Evolution and Current Politics of the North Korean Nuclear Program," 33.

[145] State Department, "Fact sheet on U.S.-Democratic People's Republic of Korea Agreed Framework."

[146] Monsourov, "The Origins, Evolution and Current Politics of the North Korean Nuclear Program," 33.

[147] State Department, "Fact sheet on U.S.-Democratic People's Republic of Korea Agreed Framework."

[148] State Department, "Fact sheet on U.S.-Democratic People's Republic of Korea Agreed Framework."

[149] Monsourov, "The Origins, Evolution and Current Politics of the North Korean Nuclear Program," 33.

special inspections to discern if a North Korean nuclear weapon exists at a secret facility.[150]

Although the Agreed Framework is still in place, problems continue at every meeting. Talks in 1995 collapsed on 20 April due to North Korea's reluctance to accept a plan to replace its nuclear reactors with safer, light-water units built and mainly financed by South Korea. North Korea's acceptance would be an admission of ROK superior expertise and would represent a major loss of face for Pyongyang. Pyongyang further stated that it would consider economic sanctions an act of war.[151] In June 1995, at the talks in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, North Korea continued to haggle over the South Korean-built light-water reactors and over monetary compensation for abandoning its old reactors. U.S. and ROK officials at the meetings talked of North Korea's frustrating tactics of reopening issues, suddenly introducing new conditions, and insisting on renegotiating done deals.[152]

The 18 September 1997 incursion of a North Korean spy submarine also called into question Pyongyang's intentions. The construction of the light-water reactors ceased until South Korea received an apology from Pyongyang.[153] Hwang Jang Yop, who

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150 Cameron W. Barr, "North Korea Jerks the U.S., South Korea in Nuke Talks," *Christian Science Monitor*, 5 June 1995. Available online at [http://plweb.csmonitor.com].

151 Jonathan S. Landay, "North Korea Talks Tough But U.S. Sees Hope on Nukes," *Christian Science Monitor*, 1 May 1995. Available online at [http://plweb.csmonitor.com].

152 Barr, "North Korea Jerks the U.S., South Korea in Nuke Talks".

153 Jonathan S. Landay, "U.S. Sighs Relief as North Korea Apologizes, Agrees to Talks," *Christian Science Monitor*, 2 Jan 1997. Available online at [http://plweb.csmonitor.com].

defected in 1997, emphasized North Korea's preparations for war and determination to invade the South. The highest level North Korean defector to date, Hwang's comments further called into question the true intentions of North Korea's negotiating tactics. The immediate effect of the economic crisis on South Korea makes it difficult for Seoul to continue the North Korean reactor construction on the same schedule and complicates an already difficult situation. Only weeks after the ground breaking for the reactors construction in North Korea, ROK was hit with a financial crisis that caused the Korean won to lose 42 percent of its value against the dollar.[154] Some officials in South Korea continue to believe that in the Agreed Framework and following talks, the United States gave away too much, too easily. They want the United States to pay more of the bill.[155] The recent delays on reactor construction have resulted in new fears that North Korea will abandon the Agreed Framework. During a May trip to Asia, U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright warned the other members of KEDO that North Korea may resume its nuclear weapons program if previous pledges are not met.[156] On 7 May, a North Korean spokesman warned the United States that if the delays continued, North Korea may resume its nuclear development program. Specifically, he said that the work on sealing spent nuclear fuel rods containing plutonium would no longer proceed, and that

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154 Carol Giacomo, "Albright Warns S. Korea On North's Nuclear Plan," *Reuters*, 1 May 1997. Available online at [http://dailynews.yahoo.com].

155 Michael Baker, "Project Links Two Koreas, But Who Will Pick Up the Tab?," *Christian Science Monitor,* 9 December 1997. Available online at [http://plweb.csmonitor.com].

156 Giacomo, "Albright Warns S. Korea On North's Nuclear Plan".

the freeze on construction of facilities would be lifted unless the United States acts.[157] These statements are tantamount to threatening to restart the weapons program.

C. CONCLUSION

South Korea's pursuit of Nordpolitik produced two outcomes. First, it established further ROK economic and diplomatic independence from the United States. Second, it threatened Pyongyang's longstanding relationship with both the PRC and the Soviet Union, casting doubt on future cooperation and security assurances. Nordpolitik helped send North Korea down the path of nuclear weapons development, ultimately leading to the 1994 nuclear crisis.

The North Korean nuclear crisis has yielded significant positive results for the regime in Pyongyang in economic, military and diplomatic terms. Seoul views Washington as having given away the farm just to keep Pyongyang from pulling out of the NPT and to ensure that North Korea will comply with the required inspections by the IAEA. The United States did away with the TEAM SPIRIT field exercise, made negative security guarantees with Pyongyang, removed all tactical nuclear weapons from the Korean peninsula and from U.S. naval surface vessels, guaranteed light-water reactors to replace the graphite ones previously operated in North Korea, warmed diplomatic ties with the DPRK and pushed forward an agreement by which ROK gives up its right, according to the NPT, to reprocess nuclear fuel. Seoul believes these events erode the traditional American security guarantee to South Korea. Monsourov refers to

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[157] FBIS-EAS-98-127, 7 May 1998.

conversations with high-ranking ROK officials in which the U.S.-DPRK negotiations are compared to a "wedding where the groom (ROK) and the bride (DPRK) were supposed to get married, but, instead, the minister (United States) fell in love with the bride, hijacked her, and fled the ceremony."[158]

[158] Monsourov, "The Origins, Evolution and Current Politics of the North Korean Nuclear Program," 37.

V. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A. STATUS OF ROK NUCLEAR CAPABILITIES

The Republic of Korea has officially stated that it will not develop nuclear weapons. In 1993 President Kim Young Sam declared that under no circumstances would South Korea attempt to develop nuclear weapons.[159] ROK signed the NPT in 1975 and in 1991 signed a document with North Korea pledging to eliminate nuclear weapons from the Korean peninsula. This agreement also restricts ROK from running reprocessing and enrichment facilities that it would otherwise have the right to operate under the NPT.

South Korea has not developed technology exclusive to the development of nuclear weapons. It does, however, possess a well-developed civilian nuclear power and research program that includes many dual use elements. South Korea now operates 9 reactors, which provide 43 percent of its total electricity. In 1994, the ROK government spent $1.5 billion for nuclear research.[160] By 2006, South Korea plans to have 27 reactors in operation.[161] Seoul also desires to become a leading exporter of nuclear power. It has signed deals with both China and Vietnam to build reactors.[162]

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159 Jameson, "No A-Arms For South Korea, Leader Pledges," A-8.

160 Suvendrini Kakuchi, "Korean Nuclear Deal Would Add Fuel to Seoul's Ambitions," *Inter Press Service*, 31 October 1995. Available on Lexis Nexis.

161 "ROK Plans For 23 Nuclear Power Reactors Noted," *Korea Herald*, 31 Jan 1994. A3.

162 Kakuchi, "Korean Nuclear Deal Would Add Fuel to Seoul's Ambitions".

ROK operates hot cells, supplied by France, to diagnose fuel problems and improve fuel quality. It is possible to use these facilities to separate plutonium, although the process would be tedious.[163] There are concerns in the United States that if ROK enlarges this facility, it could indicate an intention to use it as a reprocessing operation. Seoul has expressed strong interest in acquiring reprocessing technologies, in spite of U.S. opposition, arguing that it is essential for the export of civilian nuclear technology.[164] Although a reprocessing capability is within the constraints of the NPT, it violates the agreement ROK signed with Pyongyang in 1991. It would also take ROK one step closer to a virtual nuclear weapon capability. In addition, a new research reactor became operational at Daeduk, in 1995. Its heavy water moderated design would make it capable of producing higher amounts of plutonium, although it currently uses 19.75 percent enriched fuel, which will not produce significant amounts of plutonium.[165] Officially, ROK reactors have produced 8.4 tons of plutonium and Seoul has not reprocessed any of this material.[166]

Reports of persisting ROK interest in nuclear weapons periodically surface. Suh Sujong, former chief secretary to the head of the Agency for National Security stated that in 1991, ROK planned to develop nuclear weapons in response to the North Korean

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163 David Albright, Frans Berkout and William Walker, *Plutonium and Highly Enriched Uranium 1996: World Inventories, Capabilities and Policies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 365.

164 Patrick J. Garrity, *Nuclear Weapons and Asia-Pacific Security: Issues, Trends, Uncertainties* (Los Alamos National Laboratory, June 1997, LAUR-97-2068), 14.

165 Garrity, *Nuclear Weapons and Asia-Pacific Security: Issues, Trends, Uncertainties,* 14.

program, but that the United States stopped the project.[167] A sizable minority of South Koreans believes that ROK should pursue a reprocessing capability, although a much smaller number advocate developing nuclear weapons.[168] ROK has uranium refining and conversion facilities and a fuel fabrication capability, but lacks reprocessing plants, unless it were to use the hot cells previously mentioned.[169]

If ROK decided to develop nuclear weapons, it possesses the physical infrastructure and the technological expertise to do so. It would have to withdraw from the NPT, which would be politically damaging, especially given its close relationship with the United States. Nevertheless, given a sufficient threat, it could do so, and could use its well-developed research facilities and civilian nuclear power program to produce and separate plutonium.[170]

B. ECONOMIC FAILURE

The 1997 economic crisis hit South Korea hard. Currently, the country is revamping its economic and domestic policies, as required by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) bailout. This massive crisis, however, does not mean that a nuclear weapons

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166 Senate Committee on Governmental Affairs, *Nuclear Proliferation Factbook*, 563.

167 Albright, *Plutonium and Highly Enriched Uranium 1996: World Inventories, Capabilities and Policies*, 365.

168 Andrew Mack, "Potential, not Proliferation," *The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, 53 no. 4 (Jul/Aug 1997): 49.

169 Senate Committee on Governmental Affairs, *Nuclear Proliferation Factbook*, 509-20.

170 Senate Committee on Governmental Affairs, *Nuclear Proliferation Factbook*, 509-520.

program is beyond Seoul's grasp. A country in dire economic straits is bound to alter its defense plan. A strong defense and even a nuclear weapons program, however, are still within reach.

Three factors limit the effect of the economic crisis on South Korea's ability to develop nuclear weapons. The first is that some economists believe that the Asian tigers may end up stronger following the reforms required by the IMF.[171] With broad reaching revision and massive foreign investment, Korea could emerge from this crisis more capable of competing on the international market. There are also those who believe the crisis, while real and serious, will blow over quickly given the robust measures that are being taken by ROK and the IMF, and given the continued ability of ROK to produce goods.

The second argument is the Soviet example. During the Cold War, defense was so important that Moscow maintained a military infrastructure at all costs. The Soviet Union continued to build huge amounts of sophisticated conventional and nuclear weapons during the 1980s, even as their very state and economy crumbled around them. This example suggests that ROK could still choose to pursue a nuclear weapons program, in spite of economic hardship, if security ranked high enough as a national priority.

Finally, if extremely credible deterrence is the primary goal, nuclear weapons accomplish this goal much more cost effectively than sophisticated conventional weapons. Therefore, during an economic crisis, nuclear weapons would appear even

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[171] Gregory Clark, "Expect Most of Diverse East Asia to Come Storming Back," *The Herald Tribune,* 9 Feb, 98. Available online at [http://www.iht.com].

more attractive than developing advanced conventional weapons that are more expensive. Albert Wohlstetter argues that the cost of developing nuclear weapons for a state that already possesses a well-developed civilian nuclear power program is small in comparison with a program designed exclusively to build weapons.[172]

C. ANSWER TO THE THESIS QUESTION

During the 1950s, the Korean government saw the utility of nuclear weapons, both in the atomic diplomacy conducted by the United States during the Korean War and in the deployment of U.S. tactical nuclear weapons to the peninsula. The Korean War and the U.S.-ROK Mutual Defense Treaty established ROK reliance on the United States. The weak nature of the Mutual Defense Treaty put doubt about America's commitment to the defense of the peninsula in the minds of many South Koreans. The U.S. military presence and the deployment of tactical nuclear weapons compensated for this weakness.

During the 1960s and 1970s, however, doubts regarding U.S. commitment in Asia resurfaced. America's performance in Vietnam, the Nixon Doctrine, and U.S. troop withdrawals from ROK spurred Seoul to pursue self-reliance in national defense capability. Although the Nixon Doctrine preserved U.S. extended nuclear deterrence for ROK, this commitment was ultimately based on the Mutual Defense Treaty, a weak foundation for confidence in strategic defense. The U.S. troop presence, which was always an indicator of U.S. commitment to South Korea, was also decreasing.

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172 Albert Wohlstetter, "Spreading the Bomb without Breaking the Rules," *Foreign Policy* 25 (Winter 76/7): 163.

These factors combined to convince Seoul that U.S. extended deterrence was questionable, an unacceptable situation for ROK, whose national defense had relied on nuclear weapons since the early 1950s. Seoul resolved to develop its own capability. Diplomatic reaffirmation of U.S. commitment and presence of nuclear weapons in Korea, threats to cut off financial and technical aid to Seoul and most importantly, the cancellation of further troop withdrawals convinced ROK to halt its program. The basis for the U.S.-ROK relationship, the Mutual Defense Treaty, however, is still the weak link in terms of ROK confidence.

Is the United States forcing ROK to go nuclear in the name of nonproliferation? The preceding case study gives a mixed answer. It depicts Washington as a vital ally of South Korea, and one that has provided extended nuclear deterrence, yet one with a poor record for consistent, confidence inspiring policy. U.S. actions regarding North Korea are another link in a long chain of loss in credibility. As Waltz points out, internal balancing is a much surer path to national security than relying on an ally.[173] Although the United States has come through many times, the Korean War being the most significant incident, it has also waffled in ways that are very serious threats to ROK national security. Troop withdrawals, the Nixon Doctrine, the Vietnam record, and the aborted Carter Plan all suggest that the United States is an unreliable ally to ROK.

The possibility of a North Korean nuclear weapon has overshadowed its conventional threat during the 1990s. Although flooding, famine and harsh weather have

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[173] Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, 168.

taken their toll on the regime in Pyongyang over a number of years and certainly have reduced the readiness of the conventional forces in the north, the specter of an aggressive, nuclear capable DPRK remains a major concern to Seoul.[174] This situation could result in a nuclear chain event, leading to ROK and Japan arming themselves with nuclear weapons. South Korea possesses a robust civilian nuclear power program and research capabilities in the atomic energy field. It also possesses advanced conventional weapon capabilities that could provide delivery vehicles via ballistic missile or third and fourth generation aircraft.

Exclusive negotiations between the United States and North Korea are viewed by South Korea as endangering U.S. commitment to the defense of South Korea, particularly meetings that yield concessions such as the cancellation of the military exercises and a negative security guarantee for Pyongyang. Seoul views the warming diplomatic relations between the United States and North Korea as an unacceptable compromise in national security. Young Whan Kihl points out that, "Carter's visit also indicated to the DPRK that Seoul's views would hereafter play a lesser role in American decisions."[175]

If the U.S. guarantee of extended deterrence is no longer credible, the South Korean government may be compelled to develop such a capability itself, as President Park Chung-Hee promised to do in the 1970s when Korean confidence in the U.S. commitment to their defense ebbed. In 1993, Kim Young Sam stated that South Korea

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[174] Landay, "North Korea Talks Tough But U.S. Sees Hope on Nukes."

[175] Young. "Confrontation or Compromise," 194.

would refrain from developing nuclear weapons. However, he specifically caveated this statement with South Korea's right to pursue a nuclear option if threatened by a North Korean nuclear capability.[176] The Agreed Framework assured North Korea that the United States would not use nuclear weapons against it as long as it continues to comply with the NPT in good faith. This negative security assurance to North Korea undermines the positive one the U.S. has had with South Korea since the Korean War. Virginia Foran discusses this type of dilemma and the problem it presents to traditional security arrangements.[177] In our zeal to resolve the North Korean nuclear crisis, we may undermine an existing security guarantee with the South Koreans.

Young Whan Kihl discusses the problem of nuclear credibility related to this case. "For nuclear diplomacy to succeed as a high-risk and high-stakes game, it must be based on and backed up by military power and preparedness. The nuclear weapon states must be ready to go to war, if necessary, in order to defend their national interests and strategic position. The threat of retaliatory strikes must be credible."[178] Does this threat remain credible with the removal of U.S. tactical nuclear weapons from the peninsula and in the face of the negative and positive security assurance dilemma discussed by Foran? The concept of deterrence seems to be strengthened by North Korean nuclear capability, that is, it would make the U.S. tendency to back up South Korean security stronger if it were

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176 Young. "Confrontation or Compromise," 194.

177 Foran, Virginia, ed. *Security Assurances: Implications for the NPT and Beyond*, Draft.

178 Young. "Confrontation or Compromise," 202.

deterring a real nuclear threat. Yet, negotiations did not go in this direction and the Agreed Framework does not support this conclusion. In fact, U.S. actions during the crisis gave credence to a lack of American commitment. As Reiss asserts: "The Clinton administration calculated correctly that the American people would not go to war over the integrity of the IAEA or even over one or two nuclear weapons in North Korea."[179]

D. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. New Mutual Defense Treaty

The Mutual Defense Treaty is not an agreement that the U.S. troop presence strengthens. Even when the U.S. conventional commitment has been strong, the weakness of the Mutual Defense Treaty remains a tottering base on which to build confidence. A stronger treaty with the ROK government is an important step in preventing ROK from considering a nuclear option. For very little effort diplomatically, the United States can create a highly stable security environment in South Korea.

Today, the United States has less influence over a more economically developed and more diplomatically connected ROK. Yet, Washington is still able to effect negatively the strategic balance on the peninsula by reducing its relationship with South Korea. Promises to North Korea designed to halt its nuclear weapons program have had this effect. Rather than continue an ambiguous security relationship with Seoul, Washington must seek a stronger commitment with a new, more independent ROK. A

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[179] Reiss, *Bridled Ambition*, 282.

treaty more in line with a NATO commitment would give ROK both the independence it seeks as a developing state and the ironclad commitment it desires for national security contingencies.

2. Continued U.S. Presence

The history of the U.S.-ROK relationship is one of contradictions. Since the Second World War, South Korea relied heavily on the United States for its national defense and has sought to bolster its ties with the United States with a stronger treaty. Simultaneously, it desired more independence from the U.S. alliance. From the ROK perspective, U.S. commitment has waxed and waned, measured for the most part by U.S. troop presence and conventional commitment. While the strategic nuclear commitment has existed since the Korean War, ROK confidence in extended deterrence is measured by the size of the conventional troop presence. While the Nixon Doctrine guaranteed the U.S. strategic commitment to ROK, that same nuclear commitment lost credibility due to the decrease in conventional commitment that was outlined by the same policy. ROK leaders believed that if they were to fend for themselves in terms of defense, this would include nuclear weapons. Without conventional commitment, the nuclear guarantee was called into question.

The deployment of tactical nuclear weapons to the peninsula inspired a special kind of confidence in the United States. If a nuclear guarantee is made using only strategic weapons deployed out of the theater, it is far less credible. North Korea is more likely to believe that the United States would respond to an attack on South Korea with a

tactical nuclear weapon than with an intercontinental ballistic missile or strategic bomber. U.S. tactical nuclear weapons, however, remained in Korea until the early 1990s, when they were removed from the peninsula. It is unlikely that they will be re-deployed to the peninsula, and the announced removal of tactical nuclear weapons from all naval surface ships completely removes nuclear "flexible response" in the eyes of the Koreans. Submarine launched tactical nuclear weapons are still deployed, but they are much less "visible" a deterrent than forces deployed on the peninsula. Without tactical nuclear weapons, the continuation of troop presence will be vital to maintaining the high level of confidence that is required to prevent nuclear weapons development by South Korea.

3. International Enforcement of Nonproliferation Goals in North Korea

In addition, the United States should avoid becoming the spokesman for the IAEA and the United Nations in issues of nonproliferation. In doing so in Korea, it opened the playing field to a very creative North Korea to bring to the table virtually any unrelated issue it wished. The United States was then forced to negotiate from a position of weakness rather than from one of the strength of demanding that North Korea adhere to a signed agreement.

The United States has negotiated on behalf of the international community, allowing issues such as U.S. troop presence, ROK nuclear facilities, bilateral military exercises and force disposition to come into play. The issue is North Korea's compliance with an international treaty that its leaders have signed and ratified. Political demands involving ROK and the United States must not be used as bargaining chips with which to

alter those obligations. An international lead taken by the United Nations and the IAEA would decrease the likelihood that North Korea could use unrelated issues to avoid or delay compliance with the NPT. The focus should be on NPT obligations and the required IAEA inspections.

E. CONCLUSION

This chapter has outlined specific actions that would reduce the likelihood of ROK pursuing a nuclear weapons program. These include signing a stronger Mutual Defense Treaty, strong assurance of a continued troop presence without significant reductions, and letting the UN take the lead in the North Korean nuclear issue. This work also illustrates South Korea's capability to develop a virtual nuclear capability given its strong nuclear power program. Seoul would most likely pursue this option in a semi-covert manner, so as not to upset the international community with an open withdrawal from the NPT. Nuclear weapons allow for the ultimate in internal balancing. An ambiguous nuclear threat from North Korea combined with decreasing confidence in U.S. security assurances may lead to more defense capability in South Korea. U.S. policy changes can overcome these negative factors. If the situation continues unchanged, however, recent ROK history suggests that nuclear weapons are an increasingly attractive option for Seoul.

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